James Huneker

PAINTED VEILS

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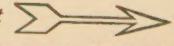
Look inside jacket 

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PAINTED VEILS

BY

JAMES HUNEKER

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THE SEVEN DEADLY VIRTUES

Now the Seven Deadly Virtues are: Humility, Charity, Meekness, Temperance, Brotherly Love, Diligence, Chastity. And the Seven Deadly Arts are: Poetry, Music, Architecture, Painting, Sculpture, Drama, Dancing.

Toward the immutable land Istar, daughter of Sin, bent her steps, toward the abode of the dead, toward the seven-gated abode where He entered, toward the abode whence there is no return.

* * *

At the first gate, the warder stripped her; he took the high tiara from her head.

At the second gate, the warder stripped her; he took the pendants from her ears.

At the third gate, the warder stripped her; he took off the precious stones that adorn her neck.

At the fourth gate, the warder stripped her; he took off the jewels that adorn her breast.

At the fifth gate, the warder stripped her; he took off the girdle that encompasses her waist.

At the sixth gate, the warder stripped her; he took the rings from her feet, the rings from her hands.

At the seventh gate, the warder stripped her; he took off the last veil that covers her body.

* * *

Istar, daughter of Sin, went into the immutable land, she took and received the Waters of Life. She gave the Sublime Waters, and thus, in the presence of all, delivered the Son of life, her young lover.

* * *

Epopèe d'Izdubar (6th Chant)
(*Englished by* W. F. Apthorp)

This Parable, with its notations and evocations of naked nerves and soul-states, is inscribed in all gratitude to the charming morganatic ladies, les belles impures, who make pleasanter this vale of tears for virile men. What shall it profit a woman if she saves her soul, but loseth love?

"La pudeur? belle vertu! qu'on attache sur soi avec des épingles."
Madame d'Epinay

"L'amour cette forme meilleure de la charité."
Catulle Mendés

"Lo! the Lesbians, their sterile sex advancing" . . .
Steeplejack

. . . "Down from the waist they are Centaurs,
Though women all above:
But to the girdle do the gods inherit,
Beneath is all the fiends';
There's hell, there's darkness, there's the sulphurous pit,
Burning, scalding, stench, consumption; fie, fie, fie! . . ."
"King Lear." Act IV, scene VI

THE FIRST GATE

At the first gate, the warder stripped her; he took the high tiara from her head . . .

I

Until the day of her death Easter never forgot that first night in New York. It was the initial twist of her ship's wheel, and the commonplace happenings which followed her entrance into the Maison Felicé were to give force and direction to her entire life.

The journey from Washington had been stupid. An early November afternoon sky heavy with threatening snow, her nerves tense with expectation, made the girl feel that the big city once reached, her troubles would be over; but at Jersey City they began. After a few blunders she reached the 23rd Street ferry and noted the snow falling in the foggy river. Her baggage had been checked to the hotel and she had nothing to do but climb into a hansom and direct the driver to west 25th Street. She made a tentative bargain with the man. Easter was prudent because she had little money. The hotel—it was in reality two old-fashioned houses with high steps and brown stone façades, the conventional residence of the early eighties—did not impress her; besides, it was snowing so thickly that she could hardly distinguish anything, and when she was admitted into the hall the light dazzled her eyes. She felt lonely, timid, uncomfortable. A tall, portly lady saluted her.

"You are Mlle. Esther Brandès? I am Madame Felicé." Her room had been engaged for a month ahead through the aid of a common friend. Her heart beat faster when the Frenchwoman politely said:

"I am sorry, Mlle. Brandès. Your room is occupied for a few days. We did not expect you till next week." The look of dismay on the newcomer's face must have appealed, for Madame added:

"But I shall put you in another room, a splendid apartment on the ground floor. You will like it. It will cost you only five dollars a day, tout compris. Do you speak French?" Easter nodded. She was so appalled at the price that she was speechless.

"But—but—" she stammered.

"Yes, I know," continued Madame in her native tongue and more pleasantly, "yes, I know, but it is only for one week and if Mlle. Brandès could see our waiting list!" That settled the matter. She bowed her head and soon a maid had her handbag open in a small bedroom adjoining a large well-furnished room, containing a grand pianoforte. There were three windows at the side. "The piano, it is the property of Monsieur Invern. He is away till next week," said the too confidential gossip. Easter handed her a tip and she bowed herself out. The chandelier gave plenty of light. There were bookcases. Much music. On the walls hung photographs of composers. Evidently the apartment of a musical person. She looked out of a window. An ex-

tension with skylights, and a noise of clattering dishes coupled with certain odours, not disagreeable to her nostrils, told her that the cuisine of the establishment was beneath. What she saw was the roof of the dining-room. Maison Felicé was one of those semi-hotels with table d'hôtes so popular in New York two or three decades ago. The cookery was French and notoriously good. Its fame spread to Virginia, where a friend of her mother's had secured, after the funeral of the poor woman, a letter of introduction to Madame Felicé. It was not easy to get into the hotel as a permanent guest.

Easter should have accounted herself lucky. She didn't. She was too miserably homesick for a home that no longer existed to bother about the exclusiveness of an hotel. Her glance traversed the lighted roof of the dining-room, and through the fast dropping snow it was arrested by a gloomy wall. Again her heart sank.

"My God!" she cried. "What a dismal prospect!" Without parents and in her wallet a hundred dollars she was alone in New York. The situation was almost melodramatic. That snowstorm viewed in the aperture between two buildings, and from the windows of a hired apartment, made an ineradicable impression. For the first time in her life she felt absolutely friendless.

Madame had told her the hour for dinner—7 till 8 p. m.; the luncheon was till 2 o'clock; and breakfast eaten in the room. A foreign atmosphere permeated the house. She turned away from the depressing night,

lighted all the gas-burners, pulled down the shades and proceeded to make a modest toilette. Her trunk hadn't arrived, so she must eat her first meal in street clothes. No gong had sounded. Summoning courage she pressed a button. No answer, but from the sounds of talking and general bustle she knew that dinner was served. Another embarrassment. How to enter a dining-room full of strangers? Easter was a well-bred young woman, but not accustomed to the world; above all, to a Bohemian world. At the Maison Felicé, she had been informed, the guests were celebrated. Singers, painters, actors, musicians there congregated. A perfect Bohemia where she would rub elbows, even speak to the people she most admired—artistic folk. She crossed a parlour, and found herself on a landing from which she could see a long table in the middle of the room, with little tables ranged along the walls. A numerous company was assembled, gabbling, eating, drinking, seemingly happy. An old chap with a bald head and grizzled moustaches saluted her rather markedly. His eyes were bloodshot. He looked prosperous and authoritative.

"I wish you the good-evening and a welcome, Mademoiselle," he said. "You must be tired and hungry. I am Monsieur Felicé. Come with me. I give you a table to yourself with only one other guest. But—a nice young man, I assure you, quite an old friend of the house." His speech was voluble, accompanied by many

gestures. He was Provençal, his wife Swiss. He stared at the girl. She was pretty, though not to his taste. He preferred blondes. She sat herself at a table near the short flight of steps that led from the foyer to the salle-à-manger. She was alone. Soon her soup was served. It was like wine to her faded spirits. Easter felt more cheerful. Decidedly a full stomach is an obstacle to melancholy. She sipped a glass of red wine. Her humour began to mellow. The soup was excellent, the fish promising—and then there stood before her, slightly bowing, a small, slender young man who introduced himself:

"Papa Felicé tells me I am to have the honour of sitting at dinner with you. My name is Stone, Alfred Stone, at your service." His manner was a trifle formal. He looked about forty and was barely thirty. A young-old man, worn, though not precisely dissipated looking. Easter didn't know whether she liked or disliked him. She resented his presence because he disturbed her dreams. But when he asked her name she became interested.

"Papa Felicé says you are a singer, Miss Brandès. Brandès! That must be a Jewish name?"

"No, I am not Jewish. And my first name Esther! My father was born in Virginia. So was I. He may have had Jewish blood in his veins. I don't know. He said his father was a Dane—"

"Aha!" cried Stone. "Georg Brandes the Danish

writer is a Jew, and there is Marthe Brandès of Paris, you know, the beautiful actress—"

"I've never been to Paris," interrupted Easter. "Is she a great actress this Marthe Brandès?"

"Not so great as alluring. Yes, she is great if compared with any English or American actress." His dark eyes glowed. He almost became animated. Easter listened with curiosity. A man who spoke with such surety was somebody. Who was this Mr. Stone? She tried him with a touch of flattery.

"You must have seen a lot of actresses to pass such a judgment." He became quite languid.

"Miss Brandès, I am a critic of the theatre and music." She eagerly responded:

"A critic of music. How nice." His depression increased.

"What's nice about it?" he asked in a sullen tone.

"Oh, to hear all the great singers and players."

"You mean, to be forced to hear a lot of mediocrities. Even the great ones, Lilli Lehmann, Brandt, the De Reszkes, get on my nerves. You can have too much of a good thing, my dear young lady." She became still more absorbed.

"Now, tell me. What are you after?" he demanded in kindly fashion.

"I mean to be a great dramatic soprano," she confidently asserted.

"Aha!" he vouchsafed. "Rather a modest programme."

"I mean to accomplish it," she retorted. He was visibly impressed.

"Of course, a great voice you must have to begin with; and then there are such items as vocal technique and dramatic temperament, and beauty—you are well supplied in that—" he gallantly bowed—"Thank you," said the girl not in the least abashed; she knew she was good-looking—"and how many other qualifications?" he interposed.

"I speak French. My mother was a Frenchwoman. I speak Italian, without an accent, my teacher said—" "Without an Italian accent, he meant?"—"No, with a Tuscan accent," the girl proudly replied; "and I'm a trained musician, a solo pianist, and accompanist and read and transpose at sight. I—" He wearily waved her words away.

"Yes, yes. I know all about you girls who play, sing, transpose and compose. There's Yankee versatility, if you please. Universal genius. And you couldn't compose a rôle any more than you could cook your husband's dinner—if you were unlucky enough to have one." Easter smiled and it was like sunrise. Something inexpressibly youthful came into the world.

"At any rate I have a good dinner if I haven't the husband," she challenged. He assented. "The cuisine here is famous. Not at Martin's, or Delmonico's, or

down on 14th Street at Moretti's is there better flavoured food." They had not reached coffee. The sweets were insignificant. Easter positively became buoyant. She must have had Celtic in her, she went from the cellar to the clouds and the clouds to the cellar with such facility. Her Avernus once achieved, the rebound was sure to follow. Momentarily she forgot her poverty, loneliness, strangeness, and Mr. Stone was like a friend in need. She played confidential.

"All my life I've been at music. I was born near Warrenton on a farm. Then we moved to Richmond. Papa was unfortunate. I appeared as a child prodigy, later I taught little girls, some older than myself. I began singing, in the cradle, mother said. Poor dear mother. She was so wrapped up in my musical career." (He thought: "They all say the same things . . . already career!") "She died last Spring. Father has been away for years"—Easter hesitated—"and here I am with lots of conceit and no money—to speak of—and yet I mean to succeed."

He admired her, this tall black-haired girl with the broad shoulders and steady eyes. Physical signs augured well. Her ears were small, shapely, her throat a tower of strength. Her bust was undeveloped, but the chest measurement unusual. He couldn't see her hips, but she sat boldly upright and there was decision in every movement, every attitude. Her eyes did not please his fastidious demands. They were not full-orbed, rather

small, deep-set, and he couldn't make up his mind whether in colour they were dark-blue or dark-green; at times they seemed both; but they went well with the blue-black hair coiled about a wide low forehead. The nose was too large for canonic beauty; but it was boldly jutting, not altogether aquiline, a good rudder for a striking countenance, and one that might steer her light ship through stormy weather. The ensemble promised. But Stone had witnessed so many auspicious beginnings that the brilliant girl, whose speech was streaked with an agreeable Southern accent, did not altogether convince him. Another! he commented, but inaudibly. He gravely inquired if she had any letters to musical people.

"Yes, to Madame Fursch-Madi, for one. Also a letter from our U. S. senator to the Director of the Metropolitan Opera House." She beamed. Stone looked at her. "Madame Fursch-Madi is a great dramatic soprano, but she hasn't much time for pupils, she is so busy with concert work. But you may have a chance if your voice is as good as you believe it to be. La Fursch has a class two afternoons in the week at the Conservatoire Cosmopolitaine, and as I know Madame Mayerbeer the director, I could give you a letter to her; better still, I could take you to her and introduce you, that is if you care to go." He is interested, without doubt, thought Easter. She was in a gleeful mood, but held herself down. The effervescent kitten tricks

might not please this cynical critic. She gladly accepted his offer. They slowly moved from the half-deserted room. Two hours had quickly passed. She was surprised. Stone spoke:

"It's too soon after eating, yet I wish I could hear your voice. Then I might judge. Perhaps Fursch-Madi won't bother with an amateur. Her forte is not tone-production, but style. She is an operatic stylist. To hear her deliver Pleurez, mes yeux from the Cid, or Printemps from Samson et Dalila is something to remember. The true Gallic tradition, broad and dramatic, with justesse in expression. Ah! Only Lilli is her superior." Out of breath, he paused. He was seldom so expansive, he loathed enthusiasm. His motto in life was Horatian. To this he superadded Richelieu's injunction "point de zêle." And now he was spilling over like a green provincial. Evil communications, he sighed.

Easter clapped her hands. As she felt herself to be the pivot of the universe, visible and invisible, she spoke only of her own sensations: "Teachers say that my voice is placed to perfection. I don't think there will be much trouble about Madame Fursch. However, Mr. Stone, if it is allowed in this hotel, I occupy a parlour and there is a pianoforte." It was soon settled. Madame Felicé was gracious. So was Monsieur. They were both poker-players and were only too glad to get to the table in their private apartment.

"Hullo!" exclaimed Stone, "you have Invern's place, haven't you?" They were in the girl's apartment.

"Who is Invern?" she mildly inquired.

"Ulick Invern, a writer, incidentally a critic. He has lived here ever since he came from Paris. No, he isn't a Frenchman. Paris born, of New York stock, but a confirmed Parisian. So am I, poor devil that I am. But he is rich, at least well-to-do, and I must make my salt writing for the newspapers. Go ahead. Sing some scales mezzo-voce, at first, it won't be such an effort at that." Easter sang. Two octaves she glided through.

"Phew!" cried her listener. "Big, fruity, lots of colour, velvety. But who placed your voice, did you say?"

The girl stubbornly answered: "Mrs. Dodd, and she said—"

"Rot! No matter what she said. You have a rare voice. It's a pity it wasn't taken in hand sooner. But you sing by the grace of God. Naturally. And that's something. No, Fursch won't bother with you. Madame Ash is your woman. She will get that refractory break in your register safely back on the rails. Take my word for it, Miss—Miss—" he hesitated. "Esther Brandès—my friends nickname me Easter, and I answer to that," she confessed. "Well, Miss Easter, I'm not so sure that your self-confidence—egotism is sometimes a form of genius, you know—isn't justified. You have voice, presence, intelligence, ambition. Good

Lord! a lot of singers with half your gifts have become famous. It all depends on you—and chance. Don't mock that word—chance. Luck is two-thirds the battle. I'd rather be lucky than rich." He ruefully thought of the last horse race at which the bookmakers had picked his ribs bare. "What time shall I call for you tomorrow?"

"Nine o'clock," she quickly responded, all flame.

"Good heavens, girl. That's the middle of the night. Let us say, after luncheon. I'll be here at 3 o'clock. I can't get in for luncheon, as I don't rise till midday. Then—ho! for the Conservatoire Cosmopolitaine, where they teach you to sing in every language—but your own. Madame Mayerbeer is Gallic or nothing." He made a formal bow and took his leave. Easter stood at the pianoforte dreaming. Was it, after all, coming, the realization of her mother's solitary ambition? But once between the sheets Easter didn't dream. The day and its wonderful events had exhausted her. She was awakened in broad daylight by the maid, who asked her if she would have coffee or chocolate.

II

Alfred Stone reflected: She is unusual. Never mind her beauty or her voice; it's her personality that will win out. What curious eyes. Hard as steel when she doesn't like the way things are going. Big heart? Yes—

for herself. A cold hard-boiled egg is that same heart. Temperament! Well, I don't know. She may be as hot as a red-hot stove, but she is cerebral all the same. Never will waste herself in the swamp of sensual sentimentality. She will learn to use a man just as a man uses a woman. Un, deux, trois—c'est fini! That's the only way. Like trying on a new pair of gloves. Do they fit? No. Chuck 'em away. I think Frida Ash is the right card for her, not Fursch. Easter is not ready yet for the footlights.

He walked into the vestibule of the Maison Felicé and to his surprise found her waiting for him.

"What! Punctuality in a future prima-donna," he jested. Easter disliked him this afternoon. She was in an umbrageous humour. She had slept soundly, the day was clear, the air crisp, the snow was not ankle-deep. Why had she turned cold? She didn't know. Stone suddenly bored her. Yet she had passed the morning thinking of him. Why his sudden interest? Would he try to profit by her? Such things she had read about in musical journals. Managers—who didn't advertise—were denounced by unselfish editors. Perhaps he would make a commission by taking her to the Cosmopolitaine. Nasty, mean suspicions closed in upon her. She couldn't shake them off. She sang some scales; she read without interest a morning newspaper that she had found in the rusty drawing-room. The French breakfast of chocolate and rolls didn't appeal

to her. She possessed a young, healthy appetite; and she missed the cozy chatter of the American breakfast-table. Several times she peeped through the glass door of her apartment, but saw no one. Various noises told her that the household was cleaning. In despair she took a warm bath and admired the rickety old tub, sheet-iron, not porcelain. She admired her body's lithe length as she faced an oval mirror. I am nice, she thought. Smooth, white, not hairy like so many girls I know. Her breasts were sketchy, but her bosom was so massive that a rich harvest was certain. Her pelvic curve was classic, her legs long and not knock-kneed. The Lord be praised for that much! she said aloud. It was her hair that most pleased her. Black with a suggestion of blue it was like a helmet on her small head. Its tone was faintly echoed in the arm-pits and on the tache d'encre, as they say in the painter's atelier. A robust girl and a desirable one, though the languorous, voluptuous air was absent. Easter might be profoundly immoral, but never a slimy odalisque. Her temperament was too tonic. Passion—yes, to the edge of tatters. Foaming passion; but no man would ever call her slave. This she resolved, as she squeezed her tiny breasts. Then she bowed low to her image, kicked her right leg on high, turned her comely back, peeped over her shoulder, mockingly stuck out her tongue as she regarded with awe—almost—the width of her delicately modelled buttocks. "Good heavens!" she ex-

claimed, "I hope I'm not going to get a married woman's bottom like Amy Brown's." Then she slowly dressed, after much pagan joy, her physical beauty.

She ate everything they brought her at the luncheon table. "Starved, that's what I am. Nothing since last night." She was glad to be alone at table. She wished to think over the situation. Her money wouldn't last long. When then? Not for a moment did she consider the possibility of a complaisant rich man. She knew her value in that direction; always, or nearly always, having a man messing about you! No, she preferred her liberty, the most precious liberty of sleeping solo, of arising in the morning alone. She swallowed her demi-tasse and found Stone at the door.

"Let's walk to Union Square," he said and she assented. They went across to Broadway. He quietly studied his companion, who, in the liveliest spirits, hummed, chattered, flirted with every good-looking man she passed, and elbowed her companion into a state of irritation. He was a stickler for the nuances of behaviour, especially in women. He, the Bohemian, frequenter of race courses, gambling hells, cafés, cocottes and even worse, couldn't tolerate a slang phrase from the mouth of a woman. He saw that Easter was crude, though not coarse. Her education had been the normal unintelligent education of small towns. She hadn't been taught to talk, walk or dress properly. Nevertheless, she wasn't slouchy, and her bearing was

distinctive. She was Esther Brandès, and six months hence she would be a full-fledged New York woman. Of that he was assured. Perhaps sooner. And men? She liked them, he saw that. Had she? Who could tell? She wasn't shy. She hadn't thus far blushed. To be sure, the conversation hadn't strayed from the conventional. Then he laughed. She turned to him.

"Let me laugh, too," she begged. "I was thinking," he explained, "of an old maid aunt of mine who used to pray the Lord she wouldn't die guessing." Easter stopped and unrestrainedly roared. He was scandalized. "Hurry up," he expostulated. "We shall be late, otherwise." But he was secretly elated at the quick-fire success of his joke. A smart girl, that; she will go far—perhaps too far. They went into the Conservatoire Cosmopolitaine. The door was opened by a polite coloured man. He said Madame was busy just then. Wouldn't they wait in the reception room? Stone called the old man "George" and gave him a cigarette. The room was on the first floor facing the entrance hall. At the stroke of four gabble was heard. Girls and young men with fiddle cases and music-rolls tumbled down stairs, while fresh classes were forming. A weary or bored instructor bustled among his pupils. A gong struck. "Now, ladies, now, gentlemen," called out George. "Upstairs, please, for Monsieur Lapoul's class."

"It's run like a railway station here," said Stone.

Then added in French, "We shall see Madame Mayerbeer first, but don't say anything about Fursch-Madi. I'd like to get you on the free-list, then, perhaps, you might help out by accompanying." Easter tried to look grateful, but couldn't. "What do they pay accompanists by the hour?" she naïvely inquired.

"'Pon my word," he answered, "you are a regular pawnbroker."

"Oh, it's all very well for you. You're a man. I must work for my living." She was tart. He grimly smiled: "A critic who has to listen to rotten singers isn't working, is he? Hello! here's Madame." A pretty plump little woman, picturesquely garbed in brown-ribbed velvet, wearing a man's collar and cravat artistically tied, tripped into the room and in French bade them the time of day. Stone took her apart and whispered in her little ear, which her loosely piled iron-gray hair did not conceal. But she was all eyes for the girl, who in turn devoured this model Parisienne. And she is an American, what chic! thought Easter. "A voice, you say, Alfred, and such good looks. I should say so. Come up stairs, Miss Brandès. Nice stage name, eh, Alfred! Of course, she will go into the Fursch class." "I don't know about that," answered Stone, who seemed to be an oracle in the eyes of Madame. "I should rather say Ash. The young lady has a lot to learn, a long road to travel—" "Yes, but"—"But me no buts," he retorted. "With Fursch-Madi she will only

get a vocal top-dressing, whereas it's the roots that need attending to. No, try Frida Ash."

"Bien, monsieur, mais vous êtes exigeant." Madame Mayerbeer turned to the girl and fairly glowed with enthusiasm.

"I am a lover of beauty, Miss Brandès, in all its forms. You must be with us. Our Conservatoire is truly international. We develop native talent irrespective of race or religion. Talent is what we are after, and I need hardly tell you that our teaching staff is the most famous in the world. Such genius. But the combination of beauty and talent—you, Mr. Stone tells me, possess a wonderful voice—All right, George. Tell her I'll be upstairs soon. Attendez. . ." She rushed out to the stairway. "Adèle, I'll be up in a minute. We have just discovered a treasure. A marvellous voice, so Mr. Stone declares. . ." A grumbling voice called down:

"Another of his discoveries—like the last, I suppose." There was ironic edge to her words. Stone never winced, Madame was only more amiable. "I'm crazy to hear you sing." There was genuine fire in her lovely eyes. Easter was quite willing. But M. Lapoul wouldn't be ready for a half-hour.

"George, tell M. Lapoul to dismiss his class for the day," cried Madame impetuously. "Say I wish to consult him about our new scheme for a Théâtre d'appli-

cation here in the Conservatoire." Ten minutes later light footsteps were heard. A fantastic Frenchman rushed in, kissed Madame's hand, bowed, till his spine cracked, before Easter and stared her out of countenance. He was the typical Gallic tenor and jeune-premier. Hair worn bang-fashion like a silly girl, a sparse, peaked beard, moustaches upturned—the conquering rooster was evoked by every movement of his graceful, insolent, interesting person. But his eyes were superb, thought Easter, who was fascinated by their size, lustre, and the heavy romantic lashes that fringed them. So this is the celebrated Victor Lapoul, the singer who turned the heads of Parisian women when he warbled so amorously at the Comique, she mused. They say he hasn't much voice left. It's all in his personality. The tenor circled her as a cat does a mouse. He wore a preposterously low collar, his hairy chest was partly visible. Ugh! Easter didn't like hairy men. She shocked her mother when a growing girl by declaring she would never marry, because she wouldn't be able to endure the sight of her husband's hairy legs when he got out of bed in the morning. Her mother shrugged despairing shoulders. I've hatched out a queer bird, this Yankee child of mine, said the Frenchwoman. But she redoubled her watch on the girl's goings and comings. No such feeble excuse as spending the night with a schoolgirl friend imposed upon this

experienced woman. Strange to relate that Easter was as strictly chaperoned as if living on the continent. She, American born, was brought up like a French provincial miss.

In the space of Victor Lapoul's room Easter sang. She had boasted to the amused Stone that her operatic répertoire began with Pinafore and ended with Isolde. Sweet Little Buttercup and Isolde! It was too much for his gravity. He said so and she was annoyed. A characteristic. The slightest contradiction and she became belligerent. She accompanied herself in "Good Night" by Dvorák. Madame was all smiles. A diplomatic girl, this, to first sing a composition by the reigning Director of the institution. Lapoul, his arms melodramatically folded, struck an attitude at the end of the instrument. He was apparently more absorbed in the face of the singer than by her singing. He made no comment when she finished. Stone cynically regarded the tenor. "Cabotin" he whispered to the patronne, who never budged. She was accustomed to his carping tongue. Easter had expected tumultuous acclaim. The silence chilled her a trifle, but she didn't lose courage. Oh! well, I'll try them with something classic, and began Isolde's Liebestod. Lapoul threw up his arms: "Suffering Jesu," he cried, "not that, not that accursed requiem of a tomcat howled over by a tabby."

"You see, he doesn't care much for Wagner," interposed Madame.

"Care much is good," laughed Stone. Lapoul left the room. "Sing something French. I'll bring him back," whispered Madame. "It is still 1870 for him." She dashed out. Stone looked at Easter, she looked at Stone. "Sing anything French," he finally commanded, but he could hardly keep his face straight. "M. Escargot will run in." "Why do you call him Escargot? His name is not Snail." Easter was all smiles as she began that classic of barber-shop and barroom, "Les Rameaux." Lapoul tiptoed in, followed by Madame. The music suited the full-bodied tones of her voice, and, as Easter knew the composition, she got through with some sense of triumph. "Rotten" was all that Stone ejaculated. The tenor applauded. A very magnificent, extraordinary, beautiful, lovely, wonderful soprano. Ah! one year in his class. Mademoiselle would be a marvellous artiste. Ravishing. Overwhelming. The Metropolitan Opera House would gladly throw open its doors to such genius. All the while he uttered this hyperbolical praise he persistently fastened his bold staring eyes upon the girl. Stone noted that he made swallowing movements as if he were about to taste a bonne-bouche. His offer left the company cold. His scheme didn't suit the plans of either Madame Mayerbeer or Alfred Stone. "Fursch-Madi," said Madame.

"She goes to Ash or no one," muttered Stone. "Why, the girl is amateurish. She has no steady production, she phrases like a fool. Madame Frida will soon fix all that." They moved out. Lapoul called to Easter. "A moment, charming demoiselle." She returned to the room and his arms clasped her and hot moist kisses were deposited on her cheek. She didn't stir. "But you are adorable. Pardon, a thousand pardons," he begged. She didn't answer. Stone outside the door winked at Madame, who indulgently smiled. A Frenchman could do no harm in her eyes. "Cochon," exclaimed Stone. Easter reappeared as cool as a dew-pearled June rose, but she wasn't blushing. "Great God! how glacial are these American misses," moaned Lapoul, when alone. But he didn't mean what he said.

III

After promising to return early the next morning Easter shook hands with Madame Mayerbeer and went away with Stone. As they descended the flight of steps a clean-shaven young man dashed past them. "Hallo, Alfred!" he cheerily cried. He saluted, but did not glance at the girl. He was in a hurry and Stone smilingly turned to his companion: "Jewel is always late. He doesn't give a hang for the clock." Her legs shook so much that she had to lean on Stone's arm. "What's the matter?" he sharply asked. "My ankle

turned. I thought I'd fall. Who was that young man with the blue eyes?" Stone looked at her. She was pale and her expression far from amiable. "Blue eyes," he echoed, "what sharp eyes are yours, Miss Brandès. I'm sorry about the ankle. Does it still hurt?" They were now arrived at Union Square. "What name did you call him?" she demanded obstinately. "Oh, Jewel —that is, Ulick Invern is his whole name. He lectures on music every week at the Cosmopolitaine—or every other week, just as it suits his lordship. Madame is fond of him. That's his misfortune—his popularity. You are living in his room." He paused and asked permission to re-light his eternal cigarette. She repeated the name:

"Ulick Invern. So that's his name." There was something so strange in her intonation that Stone stopped. "Why? Did you ever meet him? Or have you heard of his variegated behaviour?" She marched in silence by his side. Getting rid of him at 23rd Street pleading an urgent visit to one of the shops she left him standing in an amazed stupor, and quickly vanished. "Damn them for the selfish beasts they all are. They are like two peas in a pod, these singers. Ungrateful animals." He went into Valkenberg's for a drink, his vanity thoroughly ruffled. . . .

But she didn't go to the shops, instead hurried home by way of Sixth Avenue. Once in her room, with the lock turned on the outer world, she sank into a fauteuil and pressed her burning face into her hands. "Ulick

Invern. Ulick Invern. That's his name—at last. What a coward to give me a false one." When she arose her eyes were glittering, but not with tears. They were as dry as her heart and that was like a cinder in her bosom. . . .

THE SECOND GATE

At the second gate, the warder stripped her; he took the pendants from her ears. . .

I

Ulick Invern preferred the short cut down the hill to the smoother roundabout road, which, though shaded, was dusty. It was the last week of his vacation, much needed, little desired. He was loath to leave New York, best-beloved city after Paris; but his doctor advised him to try New Hampshire to relieve his hay-fever. As he went across the fields of the Forest Hills park he was forced to admit that the fortnight in Franconia had put him on his feet. No sneezing, no insomnia, no writing, lots of reading. Such reading. He had made up his mind that no fiction, either frivolous or serious, would he fetch in his trunk; not even his adored Flaubert. Nothing but books dealing with the origins of religious beliefs, mystic books; Thomas à Kempis, Apollo, by Reinach, several Cardinal Newman volumes, the Old Testament, Browning, and as a concession to his profane leanings, a copy of Petronius in the original. Ulick was a fair latinist; his literary tastes versatile. This serene September forenoon he pondered the idea of a new religion. He had been reading in Reinach's Orpheus of the mushroom swiftness with which any crazy silly superstition grows overnight in proper soil. The more ignorant the mob the

easier it is to convince with some insane doctrine. Witness the growth of Mormonism or the new cult in America which already boasted a female pope and a big following.

"A new religion," he said aloud. "Well, why not? The time seems ripe. Everything is unsettled. We are on the verge of something tremendous, a world-war, a social revolution, and yet we have never been seemingly more prosperous—I mean the entire earth. We must be entering into a new constellation; perhaps Mars is in the ascendant; or the sullen house of Saturn. . ." Ulick wasn't a star-worshipper, he liked to flirt with astrology as he flirted with a belief in the Fourth Dimension of Space. He was a well set-up young man still in the twenties, vigorous mentally and physically, nervous rather than muscular, yet capable of great powers of resistance. His friends, and he had many, said he was too volatile to compass distinction; he couldn't stick at anything over a month. This mania for the study of comparative religions was not new—he had only revived an old interest. Christianity with its stems deep in Judaism, Asiatic legends, Alexandrian mysticism; with its taboos, fetishes, totems, animism and magic, its lofty belief in the idealism of Jesus and its mumbo-jumbo conjurations and incredibly absurd miracles—this welter of old-world faiths and debasing superstition, a polytheistic judaism, held his fancy, for, as a former student of theology, he saw

more clearly the polyphonic criss-crossing of ideas and ceremonies than the majority of critics. A palimpsest, rather, many palimpsests, was this religion, which in less than two thousand years has undergone more radical changes than any that preceded it. A chameleon among religions, compared with which Buddhism is a rock of eternal certitude. But sentimentality always ends by wrecking a religion, or a nation, and Christianity is first sentimental, the romantic as opposed to the classic faiths of the Greeks and Romans.

He debouched into the road leading to Zaneburg, after a plunge down the hill. Shade-trees bordered the avenue upon which stood pretty bungalows. There were an unusual number of people walking and riding; perhaps because of Saturday, or, and he suddenly remembered, because the Hillcrest Hotel was to be sold at public auction that very noon, with all its contents. Country folk are keen on buying something for nothing. Invern flicked golden-rod, abhorred of hay-fever sufferers, and decided to go with the crowd. But first I'll stop at Zaneburg and get a drink of cider. Nothing stronger in the state; indeed, nothing could be stronger than New Hampshire cider. He was thirsty, which pleasant condition he laughingly set down to his constellation; he had been born under the sign of Aquarius the Water-Carrier.

He entered the village and made for the Inn which bore the resounding title: At the Sign of the Golden

Buck. He had hardly reached the post-office, also the general store, when noisy, discordant music struck his unwilling ears. A critic of music, once upon a time, he suffered from his sensitive hearing. He averred it was the false intonation of singers, whether in opera or concert, that had driven him from professional criticism into the theatre; from the frying-pan into the fire, he lamented. So the horrible conglomeration of noises which assailed his tympani set him to wondering—and cursing. There were the banging of big drums, tambourine thumping, tooting of fifes coupled with hideous howling without tune or rhythm; just the howling of idiots penned-up behind bars, or the screeching of hyenas on a desert plain beneath the rays of a sultry midnight moon. He looked around for a path to escape, and then decided to see the show—probably some circus. A crowd had quickly formed. Borne along he soon saw an irregular procession chiefly composed of women dancing, screaming, beating tambourines. Hysteria was in the air. Two figures, detached from the others, focussed his attention. A gigantic noseless negro wearing a scarlet turban and dressed in a gaudy gown like a woman's wrapper, headed the throng. His big eyes rolled, and at intervals he emitted a roar as he struck an exotic gong with a hammer.

"De Holy Yowlers is here!" he boomed in a formidable bass. "Welcome de Holy Yowlers. Services at de rotunda in ten minutes. Entrance free. Come one, come

all. Welcome all. Hear de Holy Yowlers." A young woman walking behind this giant and carrying a banner shrieked: "Holy Yowlers. Save your dirty souls. Dance into paradise. Holy Yowlers." Her pretty eyes were bloodshot. She staggered under the grievous burden. Her face was bloated with enthusiasm as she cursed the evil of rum-drinking. The Holy Yowlers was a prohibition organization, evidently, as the woman's words and behaviour indicated. Ulick examined her with curiosity. Here's the beginning of my new religion, he cogitated. Lots of noise, a few incomprehensible phrases, plenty of rum—and it's enough to start anything from a political party to the second advent of some sheep-god. I forgot to add fornication. The twin pillars of all religions have been, still are and ever shall be, superstition and fornication; faith in the imbecile doctrines and fornication—else the membership would dwindle. His reverie was interrupted by a voice that whispered: "It's Roarin' Nell, sartain. She's on one of her regular sprees. Nuthin' stops her. Just look at that big nigger, how he handles her. He ought to get his derned ugly head punched. Nell used to be pretty. Too much rum and religion got the best of her." It was a farm-hand who spoke. Ulick asked him questions. Nell joined them. She planted her banner—blazoned with the device of a cross and crescent on a red ground—the initials H. Y. —before him, and casually remarked:

"It's as hot as the hinges of hell. Buy a drink for me, mister."

"Surely," he answered. "I'm going to the Inn. Come along." She held back. "They wunt be selling me any drink. I'm forbidden." "How forbidden?" "Well, see here. It's this way. When I drink I don't know when to stop—" "Yes, stick to cider—" She burst into hysterical laughter. "Cider? That's the worst ever. It's a temperance drink, too. Them teetotallers just dote on cider." The procession had been halted. The coloured person had temporarily lost his zeal. Burning sunrays concentrated on his woolly skull. He vaguely passed thick fingers across his blubber lips. His eyes were soft and appealing as he gazed at Ulick. Roarin' Nell made significant motions. She threw back her head, whose shapeliness was concealed by a sunbonnet and placed a finger on her mouth. The thirst was in her and had insidiously attacked the citadel of the invading host. Brother Rainbow couldn't get any further. "Go back to de rotunda!" he bellowed to the faithful disciples, and as he once more struck the metallic gong he added: "In ten minutes, beloved brethren, de Holy Yowlers will attack de rum-devil and put him to flight." "Come along," impatiently cried Ulick, "I'm dying with thirst." "Go behind the barn, we can get what we want," cautioned Nell.

Oblivious to criticism the trio marched to a road at the side of the Inn and disappeared. The villagers

winked and smiled. The motley gang of worshippers dispersed in irregular groups, slowly moving toward the rotunda, an ancient wooden structure originally destined to house circuses, theatrical companies, musical festivals, but now crowded with the odds and ends of agricultural implements. It was not so easy to get the coveted cider at the Inn; Invern soon found that out. The landlord was in a rage over something. To the request of the young man he snarled: "Nary a drink for Roarin' Nell or for that dam coon of hers. I've been warned by the judge over at Middletown. You can have all you want, not a drop for them others." Invern was disconcerted. He was thoroughly interested in his companions and didn't like to leave them; besides, he determined to attend their service and see the queer brand of religion they would serve. A minute or two had shown him that Brother Rainbow was not a fool; rather, a cunning impostor glib of Nell. She was a poor deluded drunken creature under the control of this monstrous African. He irresolutely paused, then turned his back on the churlish innkeeper. As he dawdled across to the barn, where his fellow-conspirators waited, he was dazzled by the vision of a tall beautiful girl in white, framed by an old New England doorway, clustered with honeysuckles. "God!" he ejaculated, "where did that dream come from?" He rubbed his eyes, but the dream did not fade from the spot of blazing sunshine and honeysuckles. She

beckoned to him: "I was in the parlour," she said in contralto tones that made him vibrate, "and I heard how the old humbug lied to you. Tell your friends to come right in here. It's my room. I board at the Inn. I'll give you something better than cider." Hardly stopping to note that the girl was dark and that her smile was fascinating Ulick called to Brother Rainbow and Roarin' Nell and introduced them as he inquisitively regarded the new hostess.

"Names don't matter," she declared. "I'm Miss Richmond." "And I'm Mr. Paris," added Ulick, using the first name that occurred to him. She bade them be seated and then left the room. Brother Rainbow looked mighty solemn. Nell was like a cat in a strange cellar. Her roving eyes saw the flowers in the window-box, the white dimity curtains, the few scattered feminine ornaments. The photograph of a sweet-faced lady was on the bureau. She stared at it, and then, as if secretly, drew a hand across her eyes, and afterward the same hand across her mouth. She could have wept from sentiment and her tormenting thirst. Invern was vastly amused. Firm footsteps announced the return of the young woman. She was flushed, but triumphant. "He dared to refuse me, but I threatened to leave. I pay well. This is supposed to be the best room in the house, so here's your cider." She put down the tray with its pitcher and glasses and went to her trunk. "Here's the chaser." She held out a large liquor flask

for their astonished inspection. Ulick openly admired her, and, with that easy Celtic assurance of his, he confessed his admiration.

"I'm a Southerner, born and bred down there," she confided, "I'm not ashamed of a whisky-flask. I never drink. It's full, as you see, but I hate good folks like you to go dry. Here's to!" She poured a goodly drink into each of the glasses, except her own. "I prefer cider," she exclaimed. They drank in silence. The cider followed. Nell was all eyes. Never had she been so close to such a lovely woman. Such a gown. Invern thought the reverse. A pretty girl, but hopelessly provincial. Their gaze collided. She smiled. He closed his eyes. He seemed to have seen sparks. Perhaps it was only the whisky. Then he thought of the time. He consulted his watch. "Hello there Brother Rainbow! You're twenty minutes late. Let's go to the rotunda. Come along, do Miss—Richmond?—I think we shall have lots of fun." She nodded, and carefully locking the door she followed the others into the hot sunlight. Brother Rainbow again sounded his exotic gong as he shouted: "De Holy Yowlers. We fight de rum devil!" And his voice was more unctuous and appealing than before, possibly because the whisky hailed from Kentucky.

In single file they entered the rotunda. The building was not crowded. Although midday a rusty chandelier was lighted. The Holy Yowlers believed in mystery.

The gas-jets were to illuminate the collection platter, nothing more. A murmur greeted them and a solitary female voice shrilled: "He comes. The High Holiness comes. Bless the name of the Holy Yowlers." This signalled an outburst of yells as the black pontiff conducted his guests to the platform where were several wooden benches and a table. After looking with unaffected longing at the white girl, who mocked him, Brother Rainbow struck the mystic gong and harangued his flock. "I'se de new prophet of de Lord. Who follows me will see de Lord. Bless de name of de Holy Yowlers. Let us dance." Instantly the audience was in an uproar. The howling began. Whirling in pairs or alone, men and women behaved as if possessed by devils. Ulick had seen camp-meeting revivals, yet they were a mere hymn carnival compared with this orgy of sound and motion. And as a Southern girl the sight could not have been altogether unfamiliar to his companion, who, her face pale, held his arm as if seeking protection. He pressed that arm and he felt the pressure returned. Roarin' Nell lay outstretched on a bench. She was red in the face, her eyes closed. Brother Rainbow banged his gong, his shrewd eyes showing their whites, a sinister grin on his noseless face.

Suddenly he commanded: "Lights out!" and darkness supervened. The whirling and the howling ceased. Ulick was pinioned by a pair of arms, violently em-

braced and pushed to the floor. As his knees gave way, a moaning cry in his ear made his blood freeze. He tried to shake off the importunate lascivious embrace of a woman. In vain. The moaning ceased. From the pit below came a rutilant groaning and sharp exclamations of pain and ecstasy. Scrambling to his knees Ulick put out his hands and seized a figure. It relaxed in his arms and then came in stentorian tones: "Lights!" In the dim atmosphere he saw that he held a fainting woman, Miss Richmond. Nell sprawled on the floor next to them like a drunken drab: "Get us out of here, quick, you damned scoundrel or I'll shoot you full of holes." Ulick made a movement. But the serenity of the grand Panjandrum was undisturbed. He calmly viewed the room with its recumbent and exhausted men and women and slowly answered:

"De young lady will be all right in a moment. She has had true religion. She is now one of de Holy Yowlers." Outside the glaring sunlight stabbed his eyeballs, yet it seemed a black sun. Supporting the limp girl he set her at the edge of an old well in the yard. The dipper was in the bucket and he scooped some water which he gave her. Her olive skin was drawn and yellow, her lips a sanguinary purple. Her great eyes were narrowed to slits and their hazel fire was like a cat's eyes in the dark. She looked straight in front of her as if she were watching a horrible play. He almost felt sorry for the irreparable. Was it his

fault? What extraordinary caprice of the gods had guided his footsteps to this spot, there to meet and mingle with a girl he had never seen before . . . and then the devilish whisky . . . did they know what they were doing? The girl stirred. "Darling," he whispered, "it can't be helped. I love you. Let's go away . . . to New York." She started as if stung. "You beast! . . ." she cried, and "you beast!" With the words came a blow in the face that blinded him and she instantly fled away. It was like a bad dream. In the rotunda the Holy Yowlers were howling their pious noise punctured by the gong-strokes of Brother Rainbow. I've witnessed the birth of a new religion, muttered Ulick Invern, as he made his way across the low-lying Franconian hills, misted by the approach of a peaceful September evening . . .

THE THIRD GATE

At the third gate, the warder stripped her; he took off the precious stones that adorn her neck . . .

I

Alfred Stone spat bitterly on the floor of his bedroom—which was also his living-room and library. His cigarette tasted like toasted rag, and in his mouth there was scum. Brown, brown and yellow, he told himself. This boozing till all hours in the morning must be stopped. A hard night last night down at Lüchow's, but the crowd left there at half past one when they couldn't get anything more and went over to Andy's on Second Avenue and played poker-dice till six. No wonder I feel rotten, said Stone. It was past midday. He swallowed a cup of strong tea which he made with trembling hands. He had a concert to "cover," a concert at Mendelssohn Hall, but first he must go to his office at the "Daily Chanticleer." He looked at his image in the glass. His skin was dingy, discoloured, his eyes unnaturally dilated. A hard night and a hard face. He lighted a cigarette. Tea and tobacco soon steadied his nerves. He was in a moody humour. What's the use of anything? was its keynote. The bookmakers had hit him hard the day before; hence the drinking bout with a gang of chaps for whom he didn't care a rap. Ulick had been with them at the start, had eaten a hearty dinner, but, as usual, dodged

away when the heavy drinking began. Smart Ulick. But a bloody blighter when it came to sticking. However, I can't blame him, philosophically added Stone. Ulick doesn't drink or smoke. Why should he tag after a band of thirsty ruffians like ours? He's girl-mad, that's what he is. And why the sudden interest in Easter Brandès?

Her name gave him a new point of departure. That young woman was too shrewd by half. Too ambitious, uncannily so. The soul of a pawnbroker, he had accused her of having. Young, not bad-looking—he was critical this day—but coldly selfish; what's worse, she didn't mind letting you see how indifferent she was.

She would make a man run himself to death and take it for granted. But he was through. I bring her to the Cosmopolitaine, introduce her to the right set, and she seems to think it only natural. Not a word of thanks, if you please. She doesn't mind that stinker Lapoul messing over her, never turns a hair. And yesterday I take her to Ash, and because she hears some wholesome truths she vents her spite on me at dinner last night. What do you think of it? In the violence of his outraged dignity Stone left the table and sauntered to the window. Ugh! he groaned. It was raining and the prospect of going out to listen to a dull piano-recital—or was it some screecher of a soprano—gave him the blues worse than ever. What a rotten life, he meditated. I feel like a chicken with the pip. Oh, Lord,

how long? Well, Frida Ash, the good old girl, certainly did lay down the law to Easter. A promising career. But work, work like a galley-slave for at least four years; maybe five. I'll do it, cries Easter. A bargain, says Frida. Easter gets two or three lessons a week and in return is to be accompanist for Ash. That's a nice job, I don't think. Play accompaniments all day for a set of imbecile amateurs. But what can she do? She has no money. She is too chilly to earn any by approved horizontal methods.

He puffed a fresh cigarette. Am I fond of the girl? he asked himself. No, not by a long shot, but she will be a fine morsel for some lucky chap—with money. Oh yes, lashin's and lavin's of money she'll want. What a curious bird she is, just like Invern. She tried to pump me about him. Is she mashed on him? Who knows? I fancy the lady didn't much like vacating his rooms. She asked me, with such a funny look in her eye: "How is it your friend is in town, lecturing at the Conservatoire, and all that. Yet he doesn't live in his own apartment?" And what a thunder-cloud expression she wore when I carelessly explained: "Oh you must know, Ulick is a bit of a runabout. I suppose he has something new on his staff. He usually disappears at such times, till the period of disillusionment; then he returns to the home-nest, pale but pious. He's a queer bird also, is Ulick." Aha! the girl positively became discontented. I have to laugh. No, she won't do

for me. Her eyes are too secret, too calculating, and her ears too tiny—but they are pretty ears all the same. Heigho! I'll dress and go to my little hell hall. The man who invented musical criticism should have been evirated. Ha! that's a good word, evirated! I'll use it in my notice tomorrow. Herr Stolpstein should be evirated for the manner in which he played Beethoven. . . .

II

The huge auditorium was in twilight; with difficulty could be discerned a few isolated groups. The highlight was in the orchestral pit full of chatting men. Seidl had not yet appeared. A punctual conductor; he must have been detained this morning and the rehearsal had run on snag. In the tepid atmosphere, Easter, her eyes greedy for the forthcoming spectacle, a novel one to her, sat with Stone. As critic of a powerful morning newspaper he had the privilege of bringing friends to any rehearsal he wished. This particular affair promised to be peculiarly interesting. Lilli Lehmann, the divine Lilli, Stone called her, Jean and Edouard de Reszke, Marie Brema, Anton Van Rooy—what a Tristan and Isolde cast, with Anton Seidl at the conductor's helm! Easter had never heard Tristan sung; she knew the vocal score, and in Washington had with beating heart listened to an orchestra under Seidl play a long Wagner programme. She became a

Wagnerian in a moment. No music before this had narcotized her senses, lapped her soul into bliss, hypnotized her faculty of attention until her consciousness had swooned. Already she had battle royals daily with Madame Ash, who tried to make this too strenuous pupil see that the royal road to a comprehension of Wagner was through the music of the classics: of Bach, of Beethoven, above all, of Mozart music. "My dear," admonished the wise teacher, "you will never be anything but a sloppy amateur if you begin with Wagner. Read him. That's all. Just read him, and you may realize that he knew what he was writing about when he lays stress on the old Italian school of bel-canto. Those yelling hausfraus and bier-bassos—what do they know of the real Wagner melos? Rien! Nichts! Niente! Nothing! Go, if you get a chance, and hear Lilli Lehmann, even Nordica, who is a child compared to Lilli; both women know how to sing legato, both have studied the lieder of Schubert, Schumann, Brahms. Both began as coloratura singers. What—you don't know that Lehmann has sung the Queen in Huguenots, Filina in Mignon? The fact is, Esther—drop that silly nickname of Easter—you are like the majority of American girls. You know it all in advance. You want to sing Isolde before you can sing Buttercup. Listen to Jean de Reszke. No, he is more barytone than tenor—that's why I like him. Those tenors, Italian or German, they make me sick. They

give me nausea with their throaty voices. Only unmusical people admire tenors. Do you know that?"

But Easter was refractory. She liked the tenor voice, and, notwithstanding the fulness and richness of her middle and lower registers, she preferred her fluty upper tones. Madame Ash was pleased with the voice and told Stone that in two years she would have the girl in the concert-room. A wonderful talent, a wonderful personality, hard as nails, and all the better for it. She would keep off the men, with that cold eye. But when she does break lose—Grand Dieu! The madame comfortably shivered. She was not averse to hearing about exciting scandals—if they didn't happen in her own vocal family. Easter was more than promising material. The kind-hearted teacher and manufacturer of prima-donnas, as she merrily christened herself, was interested in the strange girl Alfred Stone had brought to her judgment. She also wondered at his noticeable interest, for she knew him as a celibate, a woman-hater, rather say, a despiser of the cloven sex. She had persuaded him, without much trouble, to invite Easter to a full-dress rehearsal at the Opera. The girl couldn't afford to pay for a seat. This he had done and now Easter was in the sixth heaven of anticipation.

At half past ten Frau Seidl telephoned the director that his assistant-director was to go ahead with the first act, which had been rehearsed by him the week

before. He was ill but would be down at midday. There was some guttural cursing, it stopped when the first enigmatic bars welled up from the mystic abyss. Easter, her eyes closed, her face flushed, swam out on the muffled ecstasy of the prelude. The curtain rose. Soon Lilli passionately broke in upon the song of the seaman, and the glorious symphony of human desire and renunciation went swirling by. The singers were in costume. Jean, warrior and lover, met his Isolde in the shock of passion and remorse, but did not flinch at the climax. Van Rooy and Brema were in the mood-key. At moments Easter thought she couldn't longer stand the suspense. She wished to cry, to roll on the floor, to tear her hair, to press her aching eyeballs till they fell out. She was in the centre of an emotional typhoon. Her previous life shrivelled up like a scroll in the clear flame of the mighty master of musical elixirs. Love and Death and Death and Love. First Things and Last. She was shocked and angered at Stone's commentary after the curtain had fallen, and the sparsely scattered auditory busily buzzing.

"Like the caterwauling of erotic cats on a midnight roof," said he. "Brute!" she murmured, but he overheard. "Brute or no brute, this ocean of sentiment over a pint of catnip—was it worth the infinite bother Wagner gave himself to deliver a mouse from the belching volcano?" "It's a mouse now," she tartly replied, "before it was a tomcat. I admire your similes." "It doesn't

matter much to me whether you do or do not." He was quite acid. "You don't know anything, while I've been listening to Tristan for years." "Why be cynical, even if you have heard it so often? It's a masterpiece among masterpieces—" she paused, breathless. "And I imagine," he continued, "you expect to sing Isolde some day better than Lilli." "I do, and if not better, that would be nearly an impossibility, at least I'll be a younger Irish Princess," she announced with the unconscious cruelty of youth. "But I'll first begin with Brangaene. That rôle I can easily better. Have patience and you will see my beautiful young witch Brangaene. She isn't supposed to be ugly and old." "What's this?" he exclaimed, "already a Wagnerian critic?" Then, suddenly, "Hello! You here?" He squeezed her elbows, and she saw standing before her in the next row a vaguely familiar figure, but the dim light puzzled her as to the person.

"Hullo!" came the answer. "Alfred, how did you get home the other night? I saw you were in for a wet time and I skipped." He looked inquiringly at the young woman. Stone apologized. "Oh, I fancied that living in the same hotel you had met. Miss Brandès, this is my very good friend, Mr. Invern. Ulick, this is the coming Lilli Lehmann. Miss Brandès is a pupil of Madame Ash, who predicts a big future. Funny, Miss Easter occupied your apartment for a few days." "Yes, Madame Felicé told me. I am very glad you did, Miss

—Miss—Brandès. What a picturesque name for the operatic stage? The only Marthe Brandès in Paris may be jealous. Aren't you from the South, from Richmond —Miss Brandès?" He had seated himself and was gazing at her, she had herself well in hand, but her stomach trembled as if sea-sick. She grasped the velvet arm of her stall and tried to keep her voice stead as she replied:

"Yes, I'm from Richmond. I was born in Virginia. Why do you ask? Is my accent so marked?" She had a good central grip on herself and presently the vibrations ceased. Stone was bored and yearned for a cigarette. "I see Seidl—I'll go out for a smoke." At once Ulick seated himself beside Easter. Eagerly he attempted to take the gloved hand next to him. She crossed her arms. Then she said in commonplace tones: "Do you know, Mr. Invern—I don't miss that lovely apartment. They put me on the third floor. I am away from the noisy kitchen and I can catch a bit of the sky instead of that depressing brick wall—" He whispered, and his voice was hoarse, as if from excess of feeling: "How can you ever forgive me—ever forgive me—Miss Richmond—pardon me, that was your name —down East, in New Hampshire . . ." Easter seemed to see smoke. She didn't answer him. Then, in her broadest, most cordial Southern tones, she asked: "Whatever, in the world are you talking about, mister?" He thought: I'm on the wrong tack. She won't

acknowledge that we met—and what a meeting—but, wait, I'll make her acknowledge—everything. She went on in her desultory conversational manner: "I was reared in Richmond. That's not my name. What did Mr. Stone call you?"

He was nettled. Absurd. As if she could pull the wool over his eyes, those clear piercing blue eyes that looked at life so amusedly, so cynically. Then Seidl rapped for silence and the curtain rose on the love-scene of all musical love-scenes.

As she watched the gothic head of Seidl she thought of him as a magician whose wand evoked magic spells, but soon she forgot Time and Space and was living in that enchanting fairyland of high daring and passion transfigured. The deep voice of Brangaene warned the lovers. Tremulous horns told of the King's return. Edouard de Reszke intoned his: "Tristan!" in the inflexions of which are compressed the reproach of betrayed friendship, and chivalry that has vanished. Passion—passion, the yearnings of the man for the woman, and the desire of the woman for the desire of the man, had summarily abolished the walls of duty, of earthy morals. A hand slipped into hers. She did not resist and the hand was hungrily held. The spell was upon her. Music, the most sensual of the arts, for it tells us of the hidden secrets of sex, immersed her body and soul in a magnetic bath; the sound-fluid entered

the porches of her ears. She was a slave manacled within the chalked circle of a wizard. To step across the line would have been an ineluctable attempt. She did not try. And to make more concrete the illusion of a consciousness transposed from the key of her everyday life, the embracement of her arm by this strange man—wasn't he a stranger to her?—sent her spirit cowering into supernatural coverts. What was she? What was he? Tristan and Isolde; Isolde and Tristan. She identified herself with the lovers, who, like the crepuscular figures stitched on some mediæval tapestry, dreamily moved across the field of her vision. Tristan fell, and Easter awoke with a start. Where has that little wretch Stone gone? The sneak, she thought. Withdrawing her arm she stood up with a sigh of delight satisfied. The lights were now on. The small but select band of invited guests were shaking hands with dear Maurice Grau, and she wondered who was the affable little bald-headed man.

Ulick quizzically took her in. He hesitated: "Come," he finally said, "come with me. I'll introduce you to my beloved friend, grand woman and artiste, Madame Lehmann. She may be of use to you in the future." For the first time Easter felt as if he were really a friend. Her chilly reserve couldn't withstand such an invitation. Lilli Lehmann! And perhaps—Oh! if it would only come true—Jean de Reszke. As she was

conducted upstairs through resounding corridors, her dreams went on wings to the glorious night when she, Esther Brandès, would hold an audience spellbound by the imperious magic of her art. Flushed, her nature sending out warm rays of happiness, Ulick was so carried away that he put his arm around her waist and cried: "You adorable girl . . ." She it was who knocked at the dressing-room door for admittance. "Komm," was uttered by a deep voice within. The youthful pair entered. . . .

On the way to the Maison Felicé she complained of hunger. "It's the emotions of a first Tristan," he told her. "Wagner exhausts one's soul and stomach. As for Tristan—oh! Tristan is a regular tapeworm. I always feel like a spaghetti dinner at Moretti's with gallons of vichy." She looked down at him, he was standing in the street, she on the sidewalk. His eyes were blazing blue. She had realized their blueness even in the dark of the auditorium. The glance-motive sounded in their personal music-drama. And, as he said to himself, with what a prelude! Almost tragic. She still gazed at him. Ulick felt his being expand. This girl was dangerous. She was different. He knew he must love her and he trembled at her hungry eyes. "Let's go to your Moretti's," she exclaimed. "I'm starving." "So am I—for another touch of your hand," he interposed. "Let's go to your Moretti's," she stubbornly repeated, "and if you wish to keep on good terms with

me pray don't call me Miss Richmond, or—'your adorable girl' . . ." He only ejaculated, "Christ!"

* * *

III

After their luncheon Easter went to Ash's for a lesson; also to pour into the sympathetic ear of Madame her impressions of the rehearsal; like the egotist she was, these personal impressions were intrinsically of more importance to her than the music or the singing. Ulick had left her, promising himself to see her at dinner that evening; he didn't propose to let Stone altogether monopolize her; but he couldn't be jealous of anybody, much less of little Alfred Stone. It was a temperamental defect and he recognized it. Never to be jealous implied either supreme self-satisfaction or blunt indifference—which is worse than the rankest egotism. As he rode down town on the Third Avenue "L" to the office of the "Clarion," he recalled the gracious reception of Easter by the great Isolde; Lilli had been unusually amiable. Was it because Paul Godard was in her dressing-room? Ulick detested Paul, though calmly. That young millionaire sprig, who dabbled in music as he did in stocks and society, went everywhere. At Baireuth Ulick had dodged his company. Paul was so complacently conscious of himself that he irritated

Ulick. And his dilettante attitude toward life and the Seven Arts was intolerable to Invern, who, notwithstanding his philosophy of laissez-faire, was a sincere student, one who despised the slipshod method and smattering of knowledge, the vice of the other young man.

Godard never noticed Ulick's reserved manner. He bubbled over when he met the critic as he bubbled over Lilli's Isolde, as he bubbled over Otero's dancing at Koster and Bial's. Paul admired all manifestations à la mode. His judgments were Mr. Everyman's. In the same breath he could praise Degas and Meissonier, Meyerbeer and Debussy. The absence of discriminating values in his conversation would send Ulick into a cold rage. He didn't like Paul's openly expressed admiration of Easter. Madame Lehmann had questioned her as to her plans, and, unasked, Paul had made some suggestions. "Now, there's Trabadello in Paris. I fancy he is the man for you. Or Matilde Marchesi." What infernal impudence, thought Ulick. A stranger butting in like that. Lehmann, hearing the name of Frida Ash, approved, adding, "But my dear young lady, you mustn't stay in New York too long. Your formative years should be spent in Europe, in Paris, in Berlin, in Milan. Some day you should try to sing at Baireuth if only the humblest rôles. You know that I was one of the Rhine-Daughters there at the first performance of the Ring in 1876. But if you go to Germany next

summer come to see me. Perhaps—if your voice—you have an excellent stage presence—who knows?" Paul Godard became ecstatic. "Ah, who knows?" he echoed like a parrot—so Ulick called him; "lucky Miss Brandès—Oh, I wonder if you are any relative of the divine Marthe—" "There he goes again with that damfool question," said Ulick to himself. "She ought to change her name." As they went away Ulick overheard Lilli say: "Yes, very effective. Cold temperament. Brilliant, but hard. She will push herself." He quickly glanced at the girl, who acted as if she hadn't heard this frank criticism. The enthusiasm which was like a halo when she had entered the presence of La Diva had quite disappeared. She was composed when she departed, after thanking Madame Lehmann for her kindness. Then and there Ulick made note that whenever anyone was polite to Easter she assumed a patronizing air. You can't have too much pride, advises Nietzsche. Ulick doubted the soundness of this axiom. Decidedly, Easter was too self-confident, too conceited, and pride goeth before a fall.

To his disappointment, when they were in the street, she began asking questions about Godard. Ulick had hoped she would be overwhelmed by the unexpected reception accorded her by Lehmann. She did not refer to the singer except to call her "a nice but condescending old lady." Paul Godard was another matter. Was he rich? Wasn't he handsome, a fascinating young

man, and so witty, wise and helpful! Didn't Ulick notice how sensible were his suggestions? Who is Trabadello? Does he teach Wagner rôles? Marchesi can't. She's for such ornamental singers as Melba and Eames. That sort of singing didn't interest her. Flute-playing —nothing stirring or dramatic. She meant to be a Wagner singer, an extraordinary Isolde and Brunnhilde. Keep your Marguerites, your Gildas, Juliettes, yes, even your Carmens. I must conquer Wagner, she triumphantly asserted. Ulick exploded. Possibly the allusions to Godard got on his nerves; anyhow, it was the proper time to put this braggart in her place. "You and your Wagner," he testily exclaimed. "Are you so silly and ignorant as to fancy that you can step out of Madame Ash's solfeggi class straight to the footlights? You are enormously ignorant—don't interrupt me. Frida has told me. Your voice is remarkable, and so is your musical memory. But you have no style, no personality—yes, don't get angry, Easter"—he paused, but her face was averted, and he couldn't tell if she were angry at the familiar address—"personality, I mean in your art; you have enough in life, too much," he ventured. She didn't reply and then they had gone to Moretti's. When they parted she seemed in good humour.

But as she strolled up Irving Place en route to her lesson her expression was far from contented. He had scratched her vanity and she felt unforgiving. What

was Ulick to her? He wasn't a music-critic, he wouldn't be so useful as Stone. Yet, he had a lot of influence. She could see that, and then hadn't he brought her to Lilli and mightn't that meeting decide her artistic fate? She made up her mind that it should. Already New York was a drag on her spirit and she a resident only a few weeks. No, she would follow Lilli to Berlin and study with her no matter what Ulick, or Stone, or Ash said to the contrary. And the money? Where in the world was it to come from? She calmly turned over in her mind the possibilities of Paul Godard. That wouldn't do, she decided, and rejected the idea, not, however, because of its inherent immorality. She began thinking of Allie Wentworth and her set. Allie was an Ash pupil and Easter played her accompaniments. An intimacy ensued. Allie was an heiress. Old Wentworth was the Olive-Oil King, or some such idiotic title, and he had money to burn, Easter reflected. There might be something in that direction. Paul was nice, his eyes had measured every inch of her, and those eyes had eloquently related their admiration. What if she played for a bigger stake? this notion she also reflected as improbable of execution; besides, she would never marry. Marriage. Stupid slavery for an ambitious woman. . . Her thought poised lightly on Ulick and despite herself she coloured . . . he is a charming boy, but so self-opinionated. She was late and had to mollify Madame Frida. Luckily the pupil

she had kept waiting was Miss Wentworth. She chatted with her at the end of the lesson. Allie was a masculine creature, who affected a mannish cut of clothes. She wore her hair closely cut and sported a hooked walking stick. Her stride and bearing intrigued Easter, who had never seen that sort before. All the Wentworth's friends were of the sporting order. All smoked, and, a shocking deviation from the conventionality of that time, they drove their own motor-cars. Easter thought them rather free in their speech, and too familiar. Allie was always hugging her when alone. She drank liqueurs with her coffee and wasn't ashamed to avow the habit. She invited Easter to visit her and Madame Frida gave her consent. They are immensely wealthy, she confided to her pupil, and may be of use to you some day. Allie is a crazy-cat but a jolly girl.

When Easter told her of Lehmann's suggestion Madame was amazed. What! You a chit who only have a voice and a pretty face to go to Lehmann before you know how to sing? If Lilli heard you once she wouldn't be so generous with her invitation. Why, child, you must stay with me two or three years, then it may be time to think of Isolde. Lilli and her Grunewald villa! Easter drawled out that she proposed singing for Lehmann after the Christmas holidays so that Lilli wouldn't be buying a pig in a poke. Again, consternation on the part of Ash. Well, if you sing for

Lilli suppose we get to work on some Bach. Easter loathed Bach, although she knew that his music was necessary to the formation of a sound vocal style. So she didn't demur, and presently she was delivering an old chorale, accompanying herself, and singing with such tonal richness and exaltation of feeling that the tears came unbidden to the eyes of the veteran teacher. Afterward she told Stone that the girl was a torment but—a genius. Yes, the word was spoken. Why, she eats the words out of my mouth, cried Madame Frida. She anticipates me. Conceited? Yes. She has a good right to be. At the present rate—she will be singing Wagner in a couple of years. . . Alfred, you think she has no temperament? She is bursting with it. When she kicks over the traces, I shouldn't like to be in the coach behind. But sly—selfishly sly. After this psychological diagnosis Madame emitted a sigh of satisfaction.

IV

Stone still stuck to his post as vis-à-vis to Easter at dinner. But since the return of Ulick the table was too small for three, and, as Ulick couldn't very well be shaken off by Stone—who faintly hoped that Easter entertained the same idea—they had asked Papa Felicé for a larger table and were given a round one in the centre of the room. The Felicés were glad to see that the men were beginning to cluster about the Southern

girl. As long as proprieties were outwardly observed no questions were asked in the Maison; they might have proved awkward. Wedding rings did not abound there, yet what a delightful oasis it was in the big, noisy city. A good dinner, cooked by an Alsatian chef, excellent wines, if you cared to order them, and a nice tight little game till any hour you cared to lose your money; it was a proverb in the Maison that Yankee guile, no matter the cards, could not prevail against the skill of the patron and his urbane wife. In sooth, it seldom did. Stone played when in funds and always cursed the house, his luck, when he lost. Ulick didn't know how to play cards, or, indeed, any games indoor or outdoor. He agreed with Huysmans, who wrote that a monument should be erected to the memory of the inventor of playing cards, for had he not done something toward the suppression of free-speech among imbeciles? He forgot the women, said Ulick. They always gabble, even on their death bed.

Ulick adored the lunar sex, minions of the moon, subject in the profoundest tides of their being to our attendant planet's influence. Apart from his studies nothing interested him like sex. Sex is the salt of life, he had declared one night in the presence of his companions. Stone growled, but Easter gave him a long, penetrating look and he went hot and cold, and was all gooseflesh in a minute. "Presently," chimed in Stone, "you will be quoting Walt Whitman's The

Woman that Waits for Me." "What did she wait for?" eagerly inquired the girl. Ulick groaned and put his hands to his ears. "All is lacking, if sex is lacking, or if the moisture of the right man is lacking! There you have it, Easter." She steadily regarded Ulick, who was blushing. "Who is this Walt Whitman? Isn't he a dirty-minded person, or is he an ex-medical student?" "He was an old woman and a windbag," answered Alfred. "I knew him well when I was in Philadelphia writing for the 'Evening Bulletin.' He boasted of a virility he never had." "I hear the eunuchs singing and thrilling," interrupted Ulick, who was fond of Heine. . . "No, I won't say that," continued Stone dispassionately; "Whitman wasn't a eunuch, at least, not mentally . . ." "Oh! what's the use of talking so much about the horrid thing?" broke in Easter. "Actions speak louder than words. When a man begins boasting about past performances—Alfred, there's a jockey phrase for you—make up your mind that man's through with women, whether he is a poet or a policeman . . ." "Easter!" exclaimed in unison the two young men. She had succeeded in shocking both the student and the cynic. Easter laughed at their hypocritical expression.

They went to Invern's rooms. Her lungs were too full of food to sing, she said, so she drummed some Chopin nocturnes and valses. Stone lolled at length on the couch and studied the Albrecht Dürer Melancolia

which hung level with his gaze. He appreciated the artistic tastes of his friend and often wondered over his future. The easy-going friendship of Ulick and the girl didn't disturb him; she was hail-fellow-well-met with every man she knew; yet he also knew that no one presumed too much with her. Invern re-appeared. They gossiped. And then came a discreet tapping on the glass door. All three simultaneously said "damn!" They were in no receptive mood for strangers. Ulick peevishly cried: "Entrez." It was Paul Godard. Without allowing a moment to elapse Paul blithely sped into the room, made a mock-reverence before Easter, said "hallo!" to Stone, and beamed on the annoyed Ulick, who politely but frigidly bade his unwelcome guest be seated. Paul paid no attention to the request. He faced the girl. "Don't mind my entering in this rude fashion, do you? Madame told me you were all here and she audibly wondered if you were having a little game. I informed her in turn that Invern hated poker too much to run a rival establishment under the same roof. Ha! ha! Now, good people, what I've come here to propose is this: I've a new touring-car, a jolly big one. It's moonlight, and the roads are fairly clear of snow, my fellow says. Let's all go for a ride in the park and stop at Delmonico's for a little supper afterward." The other men frowned. Behind Godard, Ulick shook his head in significant negation at Easter. But she was entranced by the invitation. Delmonico's and

champagne. And a real motor-car, novel enough in those days. The name was music in her ears. From a child she had heard of, had read of, Delmonico's. In the little Virginia town where she was born Harvey's at Washington had been the shibboleth of the provincial epicures. But in Richmond they said Delmonico and Harvey. Fashionable weddings and banquets took place under the roof of the famous restaurant only a couple of blocks distant. The snob, which lurks under the skin of every woman, came to life with the beckoning words of Paul Godard. Would she go? She at once accepted and went upstairs to get a warm wrap and to prink up, although she wore her best and only dinner-gown. Let the others do what they pleased. She wouldn't miss a chance like that, no, not even if she had to go alone. Alone? She looked at her image in the glass of her dressing table. Alone! No, that wouldn't do. She must have a chaperone. That was inevitable. But where to find the treasure—a blind, dumb, deaf, sleepy chaperone. Easter realized the difficulties of the campaign ahead of her. She resigned herself to the superfluous presence of Stone or Invern, or horrors, to the pair of them.

She hurried downstairs. To her astonishment there was no light in Invern's room. She shook the door. It was locked. She flared up at once. Her watch told her that she hadn't been dressing more than a quarter of an hour—a generous fifteen or twenty minutes. This

looked like a planned insult. Were those two boys jealous because Mr. Godard had invited her? Thoroughly ruffled she marched through the drawing-room determined to go for a walk, when she heard Paul's voice: "Miss Brandès, Miss Brandès. Come to this door, the car is waiting." Aglow, his handsome face betrayed his joy at having her near him. She looked blank. "Oh! Invern and Stone have gone on the job, as they put it. I presume to some theatre or concert. But," he lightly assured her, not without a tinge of malice, "I think they are both huffed because they can't come along with us." Easter didn't pause. In the car speeding under a frosty moon, she said: "Of course, they are mad. There is no opera or theatre to write about tonight. They are quite free. That was an excuse." "Aren't some men small potatoes?" cried Paul as he cuddled as closely as he dared.

V

. . . Ulick went with Stone to the opera, but he didn't enjoy himself. It was repetition night of "Les Huguenots" with the celebrated cast: Melba, Nordica, the two De Reszkes, Maurel, Plançon; but Meyerbeer —who was surely a syndicate—had ceased to interest the young man. His companion seldom sat in the "Chanticleer's" seats, consoling himself with cigarettes in the press-room. Ulick wandered about the lobby

dodging De Vivo and other ghosts from the musical past who could give you all the famous casts of the opera since it was produced. He chatted with Max Hirsh and Tom Bull, shook Maurice Grau by the hand and no longer able to endure the heated house he strolled out into Broadway and irresolutely stood at the corner. A drinking man would have passed the time more agreeably; neither a smoker nor a drinker, he was bored to death. Past eleven o'clock and nowhere to go but home. Why not? Tomorrow was to be a busy day. He had to write his Sunday screed. Ibsen again. No one else to write about. The New York theatre was simply disgusting. Poor plays reeking with greasy sensuality thinly varnished with sloppy sentimentality. That's your theatre-goer for you, he said to himself as he slowly walked down Broadway to 25th Street; either filth or tears, or both. But, then, sentimental souls are only one remove from sensuality; they call it "sensuousness" in fiction, but it's plain, everyday eroticism. I wonder what that girl is doing now? It was like an aching nerve, this question.

From the moment when they left Paul Godard, Ulick had not ceased to think of Easter. Her insensibility to the finer shades had irritated him before this. Her manners were superficially good. She was not a "noisy" girl, though evidently little restrained by convention in the matter of speech; she would blurt out the most appalling sentences, and with composed fea-

tures. Is she on the other side of good and evil, as Nietzsche, his favourite philosopher, phrased it? And how selfishly she had acceded to that snob Godard simply because he was rich and owned a motor-car. Of course, he would make love to her and, of course, she knew how to take care of herself. No doubt as to that. But Delmonico's and champagne. Oceans of it. What then? Where could they go afterwards? Would Easter be foolish enough to visit Godard's apartment—he had a swell suite on upper Madison Avenue. Surely not. But, added Ulick in a resigned mood, you never can tell with the rotten artistic temperament; always the excuse this same temperament to kick the decalogue in the midriff. Despite his grouchy humour he smiled at his acute attack of virtue.

It was within a half hour of midnight on the Hoffman House clock when he reached his street. Delmonico's was brilliantly illuminated. He paused and wondered whether he should cross, go into the café and eat a rabbit, but he feared meeting Godard. The young men hadn't parted amiably. Ulick naturally thought Paul a bit of a cad to invade his room and carry off his guest without a by-your-leave! Was he in love with Easter himself? Or was it only itching curiosity to discover her feelings concerning a certain mysterious event? He didn't know, yet it was with mixed feelings that he saw Godard's motor-car in front of the Maison Felicé, the chauffeur on guard, smoking. So

they're back, he said. No doubt in the drawing-room, or, perhaps, Godard has been drawn into the poker game. Mounting the steps that led to the second entrance, Ulick found himself in the hall at the end of which was his apartment. As he passed he peeped into the drawing-room. It was empty and as mournful as ever. He could hear the poker players in Madame's room, but he had no stomach for cards and he went to his own glass door. The lights had been extinguished in the music-room. The place, however, was faintly illuminated. Confused noises reached his ears. Voices, indistinct, unmistakably those of a man and a woman, startled him so that he stood arrested on the threshold. A struggle of some sort was under way. A man's voice pleaded. The woman's was suppressed as if with rage. At times there were outbursts and threats. A heavy object fell somewhere. Ulick's indignation boiled over. Turning up the lights at the switch he hastened into his bedroom. There he saw Easter in a half-sitting posture on the bed, her strongs arms outstretched against the assaulting male. She was fully dressed, though her skirt was rolled above her knees, revealing her lithe legs encased in black silk stockings. Her features were discomposed by emotion. Her hair deranged. She was not agreeable to contemplate.

"Don't you dare!" she was gasping as Ulick entered. At once the action of the drama halted. Half-drunk, Paul stared at Ulick. He began babbling an excuse

when he was violently shoved from the room and soon found himself in the hall. He didn't resist, for he knew the grip of Ulick, saw his broad, deep chest, and was aware that the other was the stronger. "My chauffeur," he began, but was swiftly propelled to the street door. "You mean brute. Only because I don't want to make a scandal I'd kick you into the gutter. You cad. You rotter. Trying to assault a girl in my room—" "You want her for yourself," giggled Paul in drunken fashion. He was expelled without undue gentleness and staggered into the arms of his chauffeur. A minute later Ulick heard the honk of a horn as the machine sped toward Fifth Avenue. He returned to his room inwardly rejoicing that no one had witnessed the row.

Easter lay sprawling, her hat crushed over her eyes, her arms helpless. She was asleep and slightly snoring. Her red face proclaimed a certain congestion. She's drunk, too, exclaimed Ulick. What should he do now? Summon Madame Felicé? No, not to be thought of. The Madame never demanded a wedding certificate, but in the matter of behaviour she was inflexible. A half-drunken man was looked upon as a matter of course; a drunken woman, however, was invited to leave the house after the first transgression. The Maison Felicé was eminently respectable, and, thriving hotel as it was, the police had never been called in because of a recalcitrant guest. Ulick remembered that.

Nevertheless, he shivered. The snoring of the girl increased in volume and intensity. He lifted her head and put a pillow under it; he feared she would strangle with her head so pushed into her neck. He pulled down her dress, but noted the generous proportions of the young woman who in her stupor was at his mercy. But such a temptation never came to him. His rage was not yet appeased over the ungentlemanly tactics of a clubman, who took a defenceless girl out, got her drunk because of her inexperience, and then had the insolence to bring her into the apartment of another man and attempt to rape her. What else was it? She was, thanks to her condition, nearly overpowered when he had entered. Ulick became almost heroic in his own eyes. Rescued from the ravisher—that vulgar cad! But what was he going to do with the lady? She looked as if she expected to spend the night in his bed. A pretty mess, this. Then he heard her voice:

"Ulick, darling man, my darling husband," she muttered, and opened her arms as if to embrace him. The champagne is telling the truth—at last, he thought, and lost no time in lying beside her and taking her in his arms. "Yes, you poor, dear Easter. How glad I am to be near you, I love you so"—he did love her as he felt her splendid body close to him. He kissed her on the mouth, but the champagne odour was repugnant. Easter, her eyes closed, returned his ardent hug. Sud-

denly she burst into hysterical laughter. Ulick relaxed his hold, thinking it was the effects of the champagne. He became alarmed. Someone might hear this maniacal laughter. Sitting up he placed his hand over her mouth. She gasped and struggled, pointing all the while at something. He looked in the open bathroom door. Nothing. Her laughter was becoming uncontrollable. Cursing his luck, for he had almost achieved felicity, Ulick dashed to the washstand and drew a glass of water. That would revive her and stop the damnable noise. She waved him away, chuckling: "Ulick, Ulick, look at yourself in the glass. Jewel, you've been making love to me all this time with your hat on. Oh! Jewel, I'll die over this joke"—fresh peals ensued. Chagrined, he touched his head. His silk hat was jammed over his ears. In his excitement he hadn't noticed it. With an oath he dropped the glass and turning to the bed was about to warn her that if she didn't stop he would turn her out. For the moment he hated her. What a sight he must have been. But to his consternation she was again in deep slumber. To hell with her! he exclaimed and went into the music-room where he turned on the lights and seated himself on a comfortable couch. He could not sleep. She snored on. . . . Stiff, in the dull morning, he found himself in the same spot. He tiptoed into the bedroom. Easter had gone. Mechanically he gazed into the mirror. The hat was still on his head. . . .

VI

On East 58th Street there once stood Peter Buckel's brewery. Opposite was Terrace Garden. A theatre now occupies the old brewery ground. Young people who preferred serious converse to the glitter and bang of the big Garden across the street went to Buckel's. A wooden terrace with a roof was pleasant to sit upon when the weather was warm. A huge tree grew in the middle of this esplanade and the owner had artfully made it serve as a decoration. Under its spreading foliage people supped and smoked. The town was then younger, less crowded by "undesirable citizens"—the phrase is of Theodore Roosevelt's making—and life more mellow, because less puritanical. An evening in middle May saw a group around the tree-table as it was called, the most coveted spot on the terrace. There were Ulick Invern and Alfred Stone. Next to him sat a tall thin young man addressed by his companion as Milton. He did not wear a clerical garb but the cut of him was unquestionably priestly. His harmonious features, extremely blond hair, prominent eyeballs, grey in colour, denoted refinement of mind and body. He was not in the least priggish and gave himself no sacerdotal airs. If he had done so he would soon have been lonely. Ulick and Alfred were too easy-going to endure superior pretensions in anyone: besides, they

had known Milton before he went to the Jesuits, and Ulick sincerely sorrowed when ill-health fostered by strenuous study had sent his friend temporarily back into the world he despised. He recognized that Milton had a genuine vocation.

"That was a nice hot picnic," ejaculated Stone, mopping his brow as he dipped his nose into a long beaker of beer. "Never again," chimed in Ulick. Milton became nervous. "Where have you chaps been this hot afternoon?" "You wouldn't call this hot after Hoboken," cut in Stone. "Hotter than the hinges of hell," added Ulick as he emptied his lemonade glass. "I feel like a regular tosspot this evening," he continued. "We must have swilled a bathtub of liquid this afternoon over at Meyer's in Hoboken, eh, Alfred?" "You didn't, old herring-gut," was the rather surly retort,—"but I did. Why people of reputed sanity cross the Hudson on a sweltering day to wave handkerchiefs at their friends on out-bound steamers has always puzzled me. Now, why should we have given ourselves the bother to say farewell to Easter Brandès on a crowded dock, when we could just as well have wished her bon-voyage the night before at the Maison Felicé"—"Has Miss Brandès sailed to Europe?" inquired Milton, not without interest in his voice. "Yes, she goes to Berlin, to Lilli Lehmann, thence to emerge a full-fledged prima-donna and Wagner interpreter, et patiti et patita! I can't for the life of me see why she didn't

stay under Madame Ash's wing a couple of seasons more. Mind you, I grant her talent. She is positively brilliant, but she needs steadying. Her voice, her delivery, her extraordinary memory—she already had fifteen rôles completely memorized, mastered—these are but a hint of what the future may bring forth; nevertheless, she is too young for Lehmann and—Oh, what's the use? Women don't think with their heads, they think with their matrix. They are too damned emotional. They are the sexual sex . . . Putting an idea in their heads is like placing a razor in the hands of a child . . ."

"And men, I presume, think with their cortex," interposed the cool voice of Ulick. Milton deprecatingly lifted a white hand. "I can't say I admire the turn our talk is taking. Alfred is too liberal, too fond of physiological details. I want to hear more of the art of Miss Brandès. . . ." "And less about her coda—there's a musical term for you," cried Stone. All three young men laughed. At times Alfred could be amusingly immodest. "Well, she has gone to Germany despite your advice," declared Ulick. "She is a stubborn creature and I'm quite sure she has done the right thing. That young woman has a head of her own and instinct prompts her in the right direction. She may not always think with her head, yet she has managed to land on both feet. Think of it, boys, Easter has only been here about six months. Behold! she goes to Berlin where

she will be under the protection of the greatest living Wagner singer. How did she do it? Magnetism? Beauty? Talent? All three I fancy. And she is penniless. She told me so. Yet she dresses well, and someone must be putting up for her expenses while she is abroad" . . . "Oh Ulick! Thou art an ass," sang Stone in his most derisive manner. "Has she a banker? Yes, she is lucky, she has two. Paul Godard is one—" "It's a lie!" shouted Ulick, who was at once in a fighting mood. "And the other," continued Stone, unmoved, "is the young woman who is to play chaperone to her innocence while she remains abroad. I know, Frida Ash told me everything, and between you and me and this fat old tree, I think Madame Frida is glad to lose both of her pupils. They sat rather heavily on her betimes."

"Allie Wentworth is all right," returned the mollified Invern, "but I fail to see where Master Godard comes in. He is rich, to be sure, but as mean as sour-owl dirt . . ." "The Isles of Greece, the Isles of Greece, where burning Sappho loved and sung," Stone sneeringly quoted. Silence ensued. Then Milton spoke with his gentlest intonations: "I wonder why it is that so soon as a young woman sings or goes on the stage, mud-slinging is in order?" After that query the party broke up. Stone, as usual, was bored. Ulick felt that too much had been said of the girl he bade adieu a few hours before, radiant with happiness on the upper deck

of the steamship, her arms holding a perfect sheaf of blush-roses. She had been cordial. She had kissed him on the cheek, whispering, "You dear old Jewel," and then Allie plucked at her sleeve, the whistle roared and that was the last he saw of Easter Brandès. He shook hands with Milton. Stone, as he languidly sauntered away, said as a parting shot over his shoulder: "I suppose you know the rumour 'round town that Paul Godard has been her banker? His name is on the passenger-list, too. Gay bird, Paul. Ta! Ta!" Ulick went home in a sad humour.

THE FOURTH GATE

At the fourth gate, the warder stripped her, he took off the jewels that adorn her breast . . .

I

Ulick Invern always declared that he was a New-Yorker born. This was a mild exaggeration; his mother—she had been a Bartlett before her marriage—was bred in the metropolis, but both her sons, Oswald, the elder, and Ulick, were born in Paris, where their father was Secretary at the American Legation. Needless to add that under the American flag they were registered as Americans. The elder Invern was the second son of a needy Irish peer, whose heir had retrieved the fallen fortunes of the family, an ancient one in Kerry, by marrying the only child of a wealthy Dublin iron-monger. Ulick's father through influence was sent to Washington, where he served a few years in the British Embassy. But his marriage to Madge Bartlett, beautiful, brilliant girl, rich in her own right, caused a change of plans and her husband not only resigned his post, but in due course of time became a naturalized citizen of the United States. He entered the New York banking house of his father-in-law, who was not particularly impressed by his daughter's husband nor his capacity as a business man.

The elder Bartlett saw clearly. Handsome, like all the Inverns, Ulick, Sr., became a pony-polo player of

international renown; henceforward Wall Street and the bank only saw him when he dropped in to negotiate a domestic loan. No one could dislike this big, easy-going, young, blue-eyed Celt; even his father-in-law succumbed—after intervals of frigidity—to his personal charm. His wife adored him and wept over his gaming debts. He was a loose fish. Wine, women, and the wheel well-nigh disrupted her family life. Paris offered him an escape from what he called the puritanism of New York—where, fancy! one's club shut down on you at 2 a.m.—and thus it happened that Ulick Invern, Jr., first saw the light in the French capital. With his brother, two years his senior, he received French training: The Ecole Normale, private tutors, ending with the Sorbonne. Oswald's painting talent soon manifested itself, and after eighteen the Paris of the Americans knew him no longer. He went to live on the Left Bank, in the Impasse du Maine, where, at his studio, he led the free, happy life of a moneyed artist. He had plenty of money, thanks to his indulgent mother, who from time to time visited him, and, while he was on good terms with his brother, they didn't have much in common except their love for the Mater. They worshipped her. Their father they admired, but with well-defined reservations. He was a ne'er-do-well to the last, and died an aristocratic drunkard, leaving a malodorous memory, many mistresses and a cloud of debts. His widow never mentioned his

name—that is, unless someone spoke disparagingly of him; then she betrayed resentment. The old chap was good form, but a charming blackguard, all the same—that was the verdict of his children, who speedily forgot him.

But his influence persisted beyond the grave, though the opposite of what might have been expected. Ulick told people who wondered over his abstinence that his father had drunk and smoked enough for a dozen families. So he let liquor and tobacco alone; besides, Oswald kept up the family tradition—a thirsty one. Following the mother's death, which occurred a few years after her husband's—there was heart malady in the history of the Bartletts—the two young men found themselves with a comfortable income, though not too rich. They saw little of one another. Tolerant as he was Ulick couldn't endure the sporting artistic crowd of the Latin Quarter atelier, and Oswald, on his side, found his brother a trifle pedantic, doctrinaire, even utopian. Wisely they kept asunder. A Frenchman in externals and by culture Ulick knew the men and women of the early nineties who made Paris a city of artistic and intellectual light. He was too young to have remembered Flaubert, but he visited Edmond de Goncourt at Auteuil and there encountered the group that had forsworn Zola and Naturalism. He admired the polished style of Edmond de Goncourt, a true aristocrat of letters; admired his Japonisme, his bibe-

lots, pictures, and all that went to make the ensemble of that House Beautiful. A point of disdain had begun to pierce the speech of the superb old gentleman, who confided to the sympathetic American youth that the younger generation didn't even knock at his door, that he and his dear dead brother, the illustrious Jules, had given those budding littérateurs a new opera-glass through which to view contemporary life. It was true. Dandies in their prose style, the De Goncourts had fashioned for themselves a personal vision and speech, feverish, staccato, intense. Their chief preoccupation was art, the pictorial, the tangible arts. No better book about artistic life has been written than Manette Salomon. And Madame Gervaisais is less an odyssey of a weak woman's soul than an evocation of modern Rome. Alone, Edmond had written those exquisite notations of a girl's awakening consciousness to be found in the pages of Chérie. Ulick felt that he would not long tarry in that finely filed but chilly literature.

He had encountered at one of the reunions in the famous Goncourt grenier, Henry James and also Joris Karel Huysmans, whose names in baptism were Charles Marie-George. For this misanthropic writer he had shown such a preference that he attracted the attention of his idol and was invited to call upon him at his home in the rue de Sèvres on the rive gauche. A friendship began which greatly influenced the development of the younger man's character. His father

had been what is facetiously called a "hickory" Catholic. He went to church when the spirit moved him. Yet, Irish-like, he never let the lustral week preceding Easter pass without confessing and communicating, usually going to the Trinity church on the boulevard Malsherbes, where he found a friend in a little Irish priest long stationed there for the convenience and edification of English-speaking residents. But Ulick's mother had been a High Church Episcopalian, and while she was not a fervent church woman she had consented to the baptism of her sons in the Roman Catholic religion. It is not so far away from my faith, she had told her fashionable English friends when they remonstrated with her over this backsliding from the principles of the Church of England. She, too, lacked true moral fibre, though her association with her characterless husband may have been the chief contributing cause.

Ulick, however, was not of the temperament religious. He believed, of course, in a deity, an immanent deity; his was a pleasing sort of personal pantheism. Oswald was become a Manichean, a devil-worshipper. He did not repudiate the authority of the Church. But, then, Oswald drank absinthe, and long before that artist's apotheosis, he had hitched his artistic wagon to the saturnine canvases of Paul Cézanne. Ulick, on the contrary, never indulged in parti-pris. He was born, if such a thing were possible, with an indifferent tem-

perament concerning any particular religion. All gods were divine to him, from the fetish of a South-Sea islander to the sublime doctrine of transubstantiation. He would have agreed with Baudelaire that it is neither permissible nor prudent to mock at any idol. A deity may have once made its abode in the wood or stone. Not cynical, Ulick was never convinced that any act of his could alter the inflexible law of causality. He had absorbed from Taine his deterministic leaning, luckily tempered by a sensible toleration. Whatever God is, he certainly can't exist outside of my brain-cells, argued Ulick. Each man creates a god after his own image. If I stop thinking of my particular deity-concept then he ceases to exist—for me; and that is the history of every god, every religion. All the rest is theology. Mother Church with her magnificent ceremonial, her liturgy, music, painting, sculpture, above all, architecture—for him, Gothic—appealed to his imagination, historic and æsthetic. Ulick was principally æsthetic; morals played a minor rôle in his existence.

But M. Huysmans had traversed the seven dolorous stations of his own crucified spirit and he at once made a searching examination into the conscience of his youthful admirer. He related, not without a certain muted pride, the advice of Barbey d'Aurevilly, the same advice Barbey had given Charles Baudelaire: that either the author of Là-Bas must prostrate himself at the feet of Jesus crucified, or else blow out his brains.

"C'est fait," added Huysmans. It was shortly after the epoch of En route that he told Ulick of his conversion, not an unexpected one to those who knew the umbrageous, slender writer. Had it not been for the curiously beautiful literature it produced, the various states of soul of M. Huysmans would not have riveted the fancy of Invern. The mordant epithet, picturesque phrase, the lenten rhythms of this multicoloured prose, its sharp, savoury imagery—Huysmans' spiritual landscapes are painted with the gusto of a hungry man at a banquet where the plates are composed by a chef of genius—all these and the vision of a profoundly pessimistic soul, attracted him to Huysmans as to no other modern writer. Only to Petronius Arbiter among earlier penmen would he accord an equal value. Also to St. Augustine and Thomas à Kempis. He did not apologize for this versatility in tastes.

Huysmans prodded his conscience to such good effect that he accompanied the master to St. Sulpice, and also went with him when he made the rounds of the bookstalls along the Left Bank of the Seine. It was during one of these fascinating excursions in pursuit of ancient Latin hymnal literature that Ulick was presented to Remy de Gourmont, another of his favourite writers. A second friendship began, that long outlived the death of Huysmans. Maurice Barrès and his deification of the ego, was to be the third and principal *étape* in his moral development. There was one thing,

nevertheless, that M. Huysmans could not persuade him to do; to make peace with his church. Urged to the confessional, there to cleanse his soul, to the communion-table to assuage his thirst for the infinite, Ulick would reply with a shoulder-shrug. The truth was that his sceptical analytical mind and his passion for women kept him from taking the final leap-off into piety and purity. My friend, Huysmans would insist, it is so easy! But if I relapse, as I am sure to do? would query Ulick. Then, he was assured that there was always further grace for the sinner. The waters of purification were always on tap. He could lave himself weekly—and begin over again; even the very next day. It's too easy, and it elevates religion to the dignity of a Turkish-bath, Ulick retorted. M. Huysmans, in turn, shrugged his shoulders, and the evening would end in tobacco smoke and furious discussions about art and literature.

And what evenings of ambrosia they were, mingled with the venom of the Master's critiques! He spared no one. He called Monseigneur d'Hulot, a bellicose booby, that same erudite and amiable churchman, who later wrote so discriminatingly of his bitter-tongued friend. An arsenal of opinions passed into the possession of the neophyte. But even at that early age, the formative period, his general culture was wider, more generous than the Master's. Ulick had been a student from the precocious age of seven when he was dis-

covered by his nurse reading La Fontaine's Fables and Pickwick Papers. This bi-lingual training had produced admirable results. He knew two literatures thoroughly; in addition to a fair acquaintance with German and Italian. His mother had insisted on a German university and he selected Jena because of its propinquity to Weimar. Those four years in Germany had been the white stones in his studious career. There he had learned and loved Bach and Beethoven; there he learned to know Goethe, the greatest among moderns—he detested Bismarck and the hard positivism of the Prussian pan-Germanists; Heine, Schopenhauer and Nietzsche were to come later. His reactions to the system, or lack of system, in the case of Nietzsche was like a crisis in a dangerous fever. He alternated between languor and exaltation. Schopenhauer cooled off his naturally buoyant temperament, but Nietzsche gave him ecstasy as if poured from an overflowing goblet.

He went twice weekly to Weimar, there to study pianoforte and theory with a pupil of Franz Liszt. The drowsy old town on the Ilm, once the Athens of Germany, laid his imagination under a spell. He wandered through the deserted gardens on long summer afternoons, Faust in hand, or he would go to Liszt's house in the woods, hardly a quarter hour's stroll from the garden-house of Goethe, and ponder the extraordinary activities of poet and pianist. In this same

Weimar Goethe had led an active, practical life, he, the pagan hedonist, accused by the ignorant of day-dreaming, of being a butterfly voluptuary. He was the real political ruler and administrator of Saxe-Weimar. Liszt, after a life that was Cæsarian in its triumphs, had calmly entered into his hermitage, where he taught, prayed and composed. And this is the end of every man's desire, thought the young man, who greatly aspired, though not for the prizes of the market-place. Yonder, at Jena, in Dr. Bingswanger's sanatorium, was hidden the poet-philosopher Nietzsche, whose melodious thunder-words had stirred to the core the self-satisfied materialism of his native land. But he was wounded, his eagle wings of rhapsody and rage were broken; they no longer supported him in his flights through the vasty firmament of ideas. Later he was to come to his last asylum in Upper Weimar, there to be soothed and watched over by his devoted sister, Elizabeth Foerster-Nietzsche. For Ulick he was a living presence, though the soul was absent from his body at Jena. Zarathustra and Faust, and the exquisite art of Frédéric Chopin were henceforth to be the three guiding stars in his constellation of thinkers and artists. Indeed, it was the difficulty of finding a suitable interpreter of Chopin that drove him back to Paris. His Weimar teacher believed in the motto: Aut Liszt, aut nihil! Ulick preferred the Pole to the Hungarian: besides, a teutonized Chopin was inconceivable.

II

One phrase of Huysmans he remembered: without personality, no talent. If I can't achieve a personality I shall never become a writer, thought Ulick. That's what this sweeping dictum means: but how to achieve a personality? He was forced to smile over the crudeness of his question. Either you have it or you haven't —personality. He had wished to ask M. Huysmans the road to perfection, but he put off doing so, for he knew in advance the answer: Holy Mother the Church. Then one day he received a card inscribed: "Changement de domicile: J. K. Huysmans. Maison Notre-Dame à Ligugé (Vienne)" and he felt that he would never again see his friend. Nor did he. Huysmans, become a saint, rather an acrimonious saint, had severed all earthly ties. Henceforth, till the day of his cruel death, he was with God.

Music, already a passion with Ulick, began to dominate his life. He lost interest in various absurd or depraved "movements" that floated on the surface of artistic and literary life in Paris like greasy scum on clear soup. He changed his apartment and went out on the northern line, to Villiers-le-Bel, where in a rented maisonnette, he could patrol the keyboard five or six hours daily without disturbing his neighbours. He had mastered technical difficulties years before, it

was the higher reaches of interpretation he sought. He played Bach and Beethoven with a fervour that was religious. For him, as for Hans von Bülow, the Well-Tempered Clavichord and the Sonatas were the Old and New Testaments of music. Chopin came third in this immortal trio of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit; Chopin, whose Preludes and Studies contain the past, present and future of the pianoforte. Even at this period Ulick saw clearly into the classic genius of the Polish tone-poet. Schumann ran a close second to Chopin in his affections. The glowing heart of romance, of great still forests, tangled underwoods, secret, sudden little lakes, clear and shining in the mystic daylight, their waters washed at dusk by the silver of a tender young moon; lovers' vows in the dense darkness, sighs over their hapless fate—all passion and mystery, shy, hesitating, are in his music. He, not Chopin, is the real Romantic. Brahms and the moderns were not neglected. The elusive genius of Claude Debussy was then new. Ulick admired him. He loved certain phases of Brahms; not Dr. Johannes Brahms, the ponderous philosopher, but Brahms, the romantic, the follower in the trail of Schumann. There are pages in the pianoforte music that evoke grey days when the soul in its reverse aspirations recoils on itself, half articulate, divinely stammering, to express sensations that had lain buried in its convolutions since the birth of the monad. Brahms, too,

is a mystic. His music sometimes registers moods recondite, moods that transcend normal psychic experiences. After Mendelssohn, and his crystalline shallowness, the utterances of Brahms are seemingly prophetic; a prophet who does not comprehend his own speech, though the fiery coal has touched his lips into eloquence. But the Forty-eight Preludes and Fugues, with the Beethoven sonatas, were the daily musical sustenance, the bread of life, for Ulick. They quite filled his emotional and intellectual cravings.

He didn't neglect the other arts. A brief stay in the atelier of Gérôme, later with Bonnat, failed to convince him that he had a painting hand. His eye was well-trained, not only by constant study and adventuring among the masterpieces in the Louvre, but also by sketching outdoors. The theatre was a thrice-told tale for him, his parents had been lovers of the drama, and Paris had everything to gratify his versatile tastes. In all the tohu-bohu of his activities, he did not lose sight of his chiefest ambition; to become a writer, one with an individual note. Playing the pianoforte was all very well; he knew that he had a friend for his old age; but the main business of his life was writing, and if he recognized his dilettante viewpoint he was assured that at some time this smattering of the Seven Arts—Jack of all, master of none—would prove useful in his avocation of criticism, for critic he had elected to become. Criticism was the best way to prac-

tice his scales in public and acquire a supple, steady touch on his intellectual instrument. In due time his own books would follow.

He wrote French as if it were his native tongue, as in a sense it was. English was always spoken in the Invern household; that had been a wise rule of a seldom wise father. Also French or Italian, not often German—because Ulick never met in Paris any of his old Jena associates; but, preferably French. Yet, when he essayed several flights, chiefly critical, he recognized that his was the Anglo-Saxon mind. He thought in French, the purity of which in diction could not be challenged; nevertheless, the fundamental structure of his thought was English. His French essays, which he showed to that most unselfish of professional egotists, most optimistic of pessimists, Remy de Gourmont, were soon touched on their sore spot.

"You are, my dear young friend, an Englishman, more than that, an Irishman, still more than that, an American, and, having known that beautiful lady, your dear mother, I may add, a New York American. You write well in our tongue, though not so well as Arthur Symons, anyhow, better than Oscar Wilde—who hasn't mastered our syntax—but, but—it's not vital, individual, your style. I overhear too many echoes of Flaubert, Goncourt, above all, Huysmans. That won't do. You have so saturated yourself with the ideas and methods of these masters that you have

left no room for the growth of your own personality. Jeune homme, écoutez!"—and the kindly eyes peering through the big bowed glasses pierced to the inner consciousness of his listener—"Take the advice of an old doctor of vocables. Have you written much in English? No? I thought not. That is a virgin-field for you. Go home, go back to New York, you are deracinated in Paris, as my brilliant friend, Maurice Barres puts it—what, haven't you read Barrès? Begin at once with that novel of national energy, Les Déracinés—and of a cosmopolite, detestable person—pardon!—as detestable as the dilettante attitude. Perhaps the unexpected clash with a comparatively new language, new characters, and new environment may strike a personal spark from your little grindstone in New York. Otherwise, Monsieur Ulick, you will become a replica of your brother Oswald, with whom I occasionally collaborate in a bock at the Café François-Premier; you will become a second-rate Parisian, writing excellent, colourless prose, the standardized prose of the college professor. The world over, my dear chap, college professors are alike—the Eternal Sophomores, coprolites of the ideal. No, I repeat, don't expect to get your head above the turbid stream. Return to your native heath and astonish the Yanks, as your beloved Mark Twain says—there's a Yankee genius for you, racy, original, and one who should stand four-square with Emerson, Poe and

Thoreau. But, then, you have no school of critique in America, so I suppose Mark Twain will be put in his true niche a half century hence. But do you love your country?" suddenly asked the master. Cornered, Ulick blurted out: "Certainly, I am an American, though born in Paris. Besides, I love baseball and mince pie."

"Bon, true American arts," said the writer and benevolently dismissed his ardent neophyte with the shining brow.

III

The toy-pond near the east driveway floated many miniature boats that Saturday afternoon in May. The golden-crested synagogue on the Avenue, a phallic emblem for the eyes of the initiated, stood massive, erect, well within view. Pretty children played sailors; at intervals their exigent nurses rescued them from a watery grave. The girl, straight to virginal primness, swinging a scarlet parasol, went on slow gliding feet around the basin. In her jade-coloured eyes there was the sweet faint passion of a June morning; she evoked June rather than May, a late, not an early spring-tide. She was in gold and black and wore a wide-brimmed hat of black straw. Her eyes were not large, nor yet luminous; smothered fire would have been the verdict of a portrait. Jewelled eyes, they were, but jewels that had the muffled radiance of a topaz.

Introspective her glance, sympathetic and not without a nuance of melancholy. A young thing not over eighteen, tender but suspicious, proud and dependent on those she loved, Mona went into the park every day to escape the oppressive happiness of her home. She lived with her parents. Her brother was away ten months during the year at college. She had not many friends of her age and sex because she was the companion of her father and mother. She adored them. They were adorable; the mother like an old English painting of the eighteenth century; the father, a scholar, a futile fumbler in the misty mid-region of metaphysic; but as gentle as a gentle woman, for all women are not so. At times Mona fled, so deep was her love for them. She stood in the clear soft afternoon light, more brunette than blonde, yet suggesting not twilight but dawn. Her Celtic name modulated with her character—a character, fluid, receptive, sceptical, above all, pagan in its worship of sun, moon, stars, and fair tempting nature. Her tiny beaked nose sniffed the candid air crammed with May odours. She was happy. Not a masculine shadow had projected itself across the snowy field of her virgin soul.

"By Jove! that's an interesting girl, I'll wager!" exclaimed Ulick Invern to his companion, who replied: "Come over and I'll introduce you. She is my sister Mona."

IV

They strolled to the Casino. With his accustomed flair for character Ulick recognized in the girl something out of the usual run of Americans. The charmless Yankee woman he had encountered to his discomfiture from the moment his steamer left Havre. She was the "life of the smoking-room"—on the French line ladies are permitted to invade the ship's fumoir—and he soon avoided that type. But he found her on the docks at New York and she fairly swarmed over the hotel, did this same aggressive, conceited, too well-dressed female. In Paris he had seen little of his ci-devant countrymen. He never visited the office of his father, and the recurrent advent of fresh consuls and their wives at the Embassy left him unmoved. His ideal of the American woman was the figure of his mother: exquisitely tactful, and of a veiled charm. And he enjoyed in Henry James the portraiture of the refined, if somewhat anæmic order of lovely spinsters. But the raw native who gadded about Paris, confidently criticizing everything and everybody—those women were repugnant to his sensibility. Daisy Miller was a reticent aristocrat in comparison.

Perhaps it was the Old-World texture of her manner, perhaps it was a brief sight of the exalted soul that peeped out of her timid eyes, perhaps—! but what

reason can a young man or a young woman give for their first fugitive predilections? Ulick met Mona and liked her; Mona saw Ulick and liked him. As Paul Bourget would have said, they then and there "amalgamated their sublimes," which simply meant that they were two birds limed by nascent love. The sublimities and the mingling might come later.

But this youthful couple did not pin down their sensations to an artistic formula. They chatted, laughed, walked, and when the Casino was arrived at they sat on the Terrace and Ulick told them that the spot made him homesick for Paris; Paris, his patrie psychique. Mona incredulously smiled yet wondered; how could anyone prefer Paris to New York? She had never been in Paris. Ulick lightly reproached Milton for having kept such a sister locked up, as if in a gaol. Thereat, the theological student chuckled. Mona was free as a swallow. She preferred the company of her parents to that of the frivolous chits of her own social circle. Ulick had known that the Miltons were well-to-do people who lived without ostentation, a rapidly vanishing species of New Yorkers. Again he looked at Mona, again their gaze collided. Her eyes shone. They are the eyes of a rare soul, he commented to himself. And how different the expression from the calm, objective gaze of Easter. Toujours Easter!

"There comes Paul Godard! Lord! with that creature

Blanche in his car. Don't stare, Mona, please," begged her brother. "Don't be stupid," she answered, "you dear old priest. I'll look. The woman won't hurt me." Mona measured the handsome, bold dancer, overdressed, bejewelled and resplendent, in a picture hat, who majestically moved up the terrace followed by Paul and the maître-d'hôtel. Paul pretended not to see Ulick, and Ulick turned the other way. He wasn't interested in Paul or his concubines, though he still recalled with a sullen rage the caddish behaviour of Godard the night he made Easter half-drunk; that, and the inglorious hat episode he could never forgive nor forget. "So he didn't sail, after all," he muttered. But if he was indifferent, the young girl was not. "Is that the rich Mr. Godard I read of in the newspapers?" she asked Ulick, who couldn't repress a slight shudder of disappointment. She reads the newspapers like any other American virgin, and she speaks of money! Hopeless, all these dove-eyed maidens, with their profiles of a hawk; a sweet, domesticated hawk, a hawk all the same, ready to swoop down— "Oh, let's go home, brother," broke in Mona, irrelevantly. She had sensitively noticed the inattention of her new friend and she was wounded without giving herself any reason for her slight feeling of resentment. They went away. Ulick accompanied them to the gate at 72nd Street. Mona gave him a wan smile at parting. Milton, as usual, was unaffectedly hearty. He was fond of

Ulick and had made a vow to save his soul from the eternal bonfire. She seemed to like me at first, said Ulick after he left them, though she didn't invite me to call. Oh, Lord, I wonder what mischief Easter Brandès is up to at this minute? Her name revived odious memories. Again that Paul Godard. To the devil with the exasperated poodle. Ulick went to the Utopian Club.

V

Mona Milton was what the French, with their feeling nuance, would call "fausse-maigre"; she gave an impression of slenderness which her solidly built figure contradicted. She was partial to draperies and that, perhaps, created the illusion of diaphaneity. Her health was excellent. Not even at the time when women are "minions of the moon" did she relapse into that forlorn flabbiness noticeable even to the ordinary obtuse male. Her mother had reared her in the old-fashioned way and had put her fear of God in her heart (read: human respect for the polite conventions of a rapidly disintegrating social hierarchy). But her father, who called himself agnostic, had quietly pooh-poohed his wife's solicitousness regarding the little virtues. Hedges to be vaulted if needs must, he told his daughter, his chief companion on his long tramps through Central Park, when it was a green, delightful retreat from the

city's menacing encroachment. Truth is stranger than morals, he also said. Mona loved the park. Every day saw her reading or walking through the less-footed by-ways. For her, mornings were mysteries. She would sit in the sun for hours, a book in her lap, her eyes dreaming. Her sub-conscious life was struggling for self-recognition. Her ego was transformed after puberty announced itself. She was an orchestra of cells; the multiplicity of her egos astonished, yet did not distress her. She accepted the new stream of consciousness in her that had burst its barriers and painted over her imagination a fresher, more beautiful world. Of physiology and psychology she had more than the rudiments. Sex did not puzzle her, only its cabined seclusion from the general current of daily life. Her mother had been frank with her since she had reached the age of curiousness; in turn Mona was frank with her father. She asked him questions that she would not ask her mother and he answered them unhesitatingly. He believed that insincerity cloaked a multitude of stupidities. One day when she was hardly sixteen she said: "Papa, why do I love dolls so much?" "The maternal instinct," he had replied. "Oh, yes, anybody knows that, but why am I different from other girls?" "Different, my dear?" "Yes, different. I haven't one friend who loves dolls. They are fond of dogs but laugh at me when I dress and undress my darling doll. Lydia Fuller says I'll be married at eighteen and have twins

at nineteen—maybe sooner," added Mona, pensively. The old man only shook his head and resumed his Schopenhauer.

The rearing of the girl, withal superficial, covered a wide variety of authors and subjects. She knew French fiction so well that she couldn't become interested in the hypocritical half-way house of English-writing novelists. What's the use of writing about life, she complained to her mother, and leave life out of the story? The scabrous element in Gallic light literature amused her, but she preferred Flaubert to Paul de Kock, Balzac to Zola. Memoirs enchained her fancy. The utterances and actions of real men and women appealed. Casanova, who has left the world its most frank and compiete autobiography, was for Mona as is romance to other girls of her age; Casanova, Benvenuto Cellini and the Memoirs of the Duc de Saint-Simon. Rabelais she dismissed and for Benjamin Constant and Stendhal she only entertained mild respect. She admired the electric energy of Julien Sorel and Mathilde de la Môle, but they left her cold. As for the pessimists, Senacour, Amiel and them that confide to diaries, their pen dipped in their own salty tears, she spoke contemptuously. Weaklings, all. What if they did write charmingly? She longed for virility; that spelled charm for her. The more violent pages in the Old Testament, Shakespeare and Faust; but she held the revelation of the New Testament in moderate

esteem. Too much oriental fatalism. Too much turning the "other cheek," to please her. The person of Christ seemed apocryphal. Such a man couldn't exist twenty-four hours without being killed on our murder-loving planet. Notwithstanding all these contradictions in her undeveloped character, Mona was far from being an "advanced" young woman; indeed, her classmates at college had voted her desperately old-fashioned; worse—a womanly woman. Secretly she wished that her soul could be like a jungle at night, filled with the cries of monstrous sins. But it wasn't.

She continued to love her doll, not that she disliked cats and dogs and birds, only that the doll, the simulacrum of the future child, touched her to her innermost fibres. She had the brother-cult, yet she loved no one, except her father, so much as the absurdly big French doll, the last of a long line dating back to her babyhood, that slept with her every night. The old folks were at first amused, then edified by this stubborn reaction to a profound instinct. In time they became accustomed to seeing a staring wax effigy on the pillow of their daughter's couch, attired in a neat nightdress and lace cap. Ah, well! had said the father, it is a premonitory symptom, yet she is happier now, dear child, than she will be with her future husband. Considering her self-effacing nature, the reply of his wife was rather tart: "If you read less Schopenhauer you wouldn't be so prejudiced against my sex. To hear

you talk one might suppose that your married life had been a vale of tears." To which the old man humbly and affectionately replied: "Instead of a bed of roses, as it is," and surprised his spouse by warmly kissing her.

They didn't forbid Mona the company of young men but she made no attempt to meet anyone. Her brother was away most of the time at the seminary and his friends were theological students, neuter persons she evaded rather than despised. Voluntary eunuchs, enemies of the very source of life, she felt uncomfortable in their presence, as she would have been embarrassed if a hermaphrodite had been pointed out to her. The unnatural was merely a mediæval idea, but the antinatural was to be feared and avoided. She did not say this to her brother, who in her eyes was a saint, but she said as much to her father, who sympathized with her. Another confusion in her mind was the degrading of the major instinct of life—after hunger: Reproduction. If, as the Bible says, fornication is a rank sin, why do a few words mumbled over a man and woman by a clergyman or magistrate make it less a sin? It's the same vile act, isn't it, even in marriage? Her mother was more shocked at her expression than at the idea which prompted it—an idea as old as the hills. "But, Mona, people don't think such things, much less speak them." "They do, mother. There isn't a girl in the world who hasn't had this same thought, though

she may keep it in the secret cabinet of her mind." Her mother shook her head but didn't dare speak of sin, or redemption or the holy sacrament of matrimony instituted by the Church to bless the most animal of the functions, to lend it dignity, to create a safeguard for the children, not to mention the fact that this sacrament screens the shock and doubts and hesitations of pure-minded girls, to whom physical union with a man would be otherwise repulsive. No, this "theological bric-à-brac," as Mr. Milton called the tenets of religion, his wife had been forbidden to speak of to her children. Her son was, to her surprise, like a swan hatched from a brood of ducklings, and now Mona was beginning to disquiet her. A good girl, a loving dutiful daughter—nevertheless, disquieting because of her absolutely natural attitude toward forbidden themes, so natural that she often embarrassed her mother.

"Mother," she had abruptly exclaimed about this time, "Mother, I wonder why brother is so inclined to piety. He should have been the girl, I the boy. Mother—I am beginning to believe that something was wrong in your marriage—" "Oh!" ejaculated the unhappy woman, who didn't know what terrible speech would follow: "I firmly believe, you dear old 'fraidcat Mother, that papa has never been unfaithful to you since you two darling old sillies were married." Mrs. Milton refused to unbend during an entire evening.

VI

After Ulick had given his hat and stick to the garderobe he walked through the café to the dining-room on the University Place side. Martin's was his favourite rendezvous. The cuisine, the cellar, the service, were the best in town. Ulick lived at the Maison Felicé, but liked a change of menu and venue. He was known at Martin's and was soon taken to a window table when, astonished, he noted his immediate neighbour. She held out her hand: "Such coincidences do occur, outside of novels," she said. He sank into a seat facing her. "May I?" he begged. She nodded. Mona was fond of good things to eat. At home if the cook had served stewed potato-peelings her parents would have meekly swallowed them. They had little appetite for food or drink, none at all for the finer shades of cookery, for the gentle art of the gourmet. Mona went daily into the kitchen and conspired in company with the cook; therefore, she occasionally ate something that had flavour. But when she was hard-pressed by artistic hunger, as she called it, she walked down the Avenue to 9th Street, there turned eastward and reached Martin's, always in a famished condition.

"You haven't ordered, have you, Miss Milton?" asked Ulick. She shook her head, negatively. He beckoned to the captain of the dining-room and after

some whispering a waiter was instructed. No wine was commanded, neither drank wine. Vichy Célestins and wonderful coffee with cream made their appearance in company with French rolls and butter, followed by a variation on the theme of eggs—œufs à la Martin—then a filet de sole au gratin—and a Chauteaubriand steak with a Salade Russe—good heavens, mused the girl, he has a master-palate. It was true. Ulick, despite his fondness for mince pie and Philadelphia scrapple, could not endure the national cuisine. We are barbarians compared with the French, he openly asserted, who know how to eat, drink and think.

"And now, my dear Miss Milton, I shall apologize for my rudeness. I never asked you if you expected anyone, but took for granted that my company would be agreeable. I ask your pardon. How are you, and how is your very good brother? Dear old Milt." She was all animation.

"I'm glad you like Milt. I adore him. What a pity he is going to be a priest." Ulick looked surprised. She coloured. "I mean," she pursued, "he should have picked out a more liberal profession."

"Religion is so narrowing"—"Religion is an ensemble of scruples that impede the faculty of reason," he interrupted in sing-song tones. "Who said that?" she quickly asked. "I think the learned Professor Salomon Reinach." "You are right but your quotation is incor-

rect." For the third time that morning he was surprised. A blue-stocking, a theologian in petticoats; perhaps an agnostic. Yet she didn't seem "modern" or of the overcultured type. "What Reinach wrote is this: 'Religion is a sum of scruples which impede the free exercise of our faculties.'" She pronounced this little speech as if such definitions were the daily bread of her discourse. "Aren't those eggs delicious?" he asked. He was nettled. He wished to change the tide of conversation. She assented and smiled at him with such a mischievous smile, both a challenge and a conciliation, that he laughed. She laughed, and she extended her hand to him. He took it. The incident became a memory.

Her hands were not small; shapely and capable, they were white and carefully tended. He had made a study of the hand. Why shouldn't he? A pianist, a writer, who hated the type-machine, believing that only with the pen, the stylus, could a man create prose and poetry; all the rest is commercial. Yet the hands of Mona were not what he called the hands of an artist. Their forms were largely-moulded, the fingers, charged with character; the tips were not spatula-shaped. His curiosity was aroused. They awaited the fish. "Let me look at the palm of your left hand," he pleaded. She showed it without coquetry. He noted the deeply graven and long life-line, but the abnormal development of the Venus-hill caused him to ejaculate:

"Dio mio! you must have an affectionate disposition." She said without a suspicion of mock-modesty: "I love children," and then they attacked the sole. He couldn't help admiring her forthright manner. A candid girl. Therefore a good girl. And how interesting. She thought: If he doesn't like my plain speaking he isn't the man for me. Love me, love my doll, she whimsically concluded. If the secrets of a maiden's and youth's souls could be spilled on the table, as salt is sometimes spilled, many a marriage made in heaven or hell would never be consummated. For ten minutes their teeth were busy.

She didn't smoke because in those days ladies were not supposed to know the taste of cigarettes. There are minor drawbacks in every age. She saw his long, nervous fingers with their suggestion of fineness, of power, saw the oval face and the clear-cut features—his profile made her dream of the profiles of decadent emperors of the Lower Empire; saw that his nose and brow modulated in the Napoleonic way, a common enough trait throughout the Midi of France; saw his sensual lips, and simply loved the kindly glance of his heavily lidded blue eyes; blue of a penetrating, celestial intensity. His vitality was concentrated in his eyes, which were always speculative, seldom tender. Ulick, thou art a jewel! she murmured, and thereafter to herself named him Jewel. (As had Easter, before her.)

He saw, what he had with clairvoyance called an

interesting girl. He didn't say pretty or beautiful; sympathetic, would be a more truthful ascription. His experienced glance roved over her face and figure. He measured, as would an architect, the latent powers of strength and resistance in her muscular conformation. Not a skinny bird, anyhow, he said with a sigh of relief. He is undressing me now, she thought. If he were, it was not in a salacious spirit. Voluptuary as he was, Ulick didn't feel a spark of erotic emotion for his companion. His admiration for her was sexually disinterested. She hasn't the pull of sex like Easter, yet I don't know—she is not awakened.

"Sir critic, when you have made all the specifications, registered the shortcomings, won't you please say something? I'm dying to hear about yourself. Milt has told me of your ambitions. I wonder, though, that you should have left Paris for this noisy Tophet of a New York." It was his turn to colour. The damned girl seemed to know exactly the nature of the stew simmering in his mental laboratory. But no young man of spirit needs a second invitation to talk about himself, his ways, his days, his mighty ambitions. He broke loose and at once she was swirled along on the swift crest of his eloquence.

He told her of his family, of his Parisian life, of his distinguished friends, of Jena, Weimar, Liszt and Nietzsche. He explained why he had selected New York as the best vantage-ground, the best waiting spot

from which to wage war with his future public. He spoke of his music. He spoke of his physical strength. She interrupted to inquire why he, Paris-born, neither smoked nor drank. Surely not because of puritanical reasons. He violently demurred; then in an indiscreet burst of confidence he related the reason why Goethe didn't use tobacco; he didn't mince words; she understood, but didn't blush, as another girl might have done. Tobacco, he ingenuously declared, attenuates the virile quality of a man, wine is also dangerous no matter what the poets sing. Yes, but what will-power is yours, she commented. He expanded his chest and straightway stared into her eager eyes. Then it was, for the first time since they met, each looked another way. They had both seen things not set down every day on the human slate. She felt positively uncomfortable, and he said to himself: Steady, old chap, is the mot d'ordre. She is Milt's sister!

"I write about the stage because I can no longer endure listening to music. I tried my hand at musical criticism when I first landed. Now, as the curtain goes up at the opera, I have a queer feeling in the pit of my stomach. I call it æsthetic nausea. To hear over and over again the same old arias, the same bad singing, and then the stale phrases that we are compelled to write after each performance—phew! What a waste of time, what a re-chewing of banal ideas. And then, the receptive frame of mind; always listen-

ing to other men's ideas, or the lack of them. Again I say—what a sheer waste of time for anyone who wishes to be individual, to create, no matter how slight the performance." He paused for lack of wind. "Go on," she urged. "The theatres are pretty bad, but at least you are dealing with actuality. Once in a while a play comes along by Ibsen, and then you are in contact with the stuff of life. Music is technical, emotional as it may be; but just try to write of it in terms of emotion and your pathos is soon bathos. Pictures are easier to handle because they resemble something in the world. Music does not. It is dug out of our subliminal self, brought to the surface of our consciousness by the composer's art—self-explorer is a truer title than composer, who as a matter of fact decomposes his soul-states, distils his most precious essence into tone. But I fear I bore you—Miss Mona." "Go on," she commanded.

"Well, there isn't much further to go on, I am glad for your sake. I soon abandoned music, which I love all the better for not being forced to write about it. I felt strange at the opera house, I didn't become closely acquainted with my colleagues, so I was glad when the 'Clarion' gave me the berth of dramatic critic. Now I can fight every day with erudite William Winter—Lord! how that little man can write English—over the Ibsen problem. Wagner is accepted here, yet a more original thinker, Henrik Ibsen, is slighted,

is even called immoral, he the most moral of dramatists. Let's go for a ride," he exclaimed, "a beautiful day wasted over sterile æsthetics. What do you say—Miss Mona?" (That's twice he called me Mona!) She consented. The prospect of a trip through the park sitting next to this lively young man pleased her. "We shan't take a cab. I like a hansom better. Don't you love the good old English hansom with the slightly shabby but always sympathetic driver wearing a battered silk hat tipped on the side of his disreputable skull? Besides, Miss Mona—a hansom is Cupid's chariot. Let's go." When Ulick started in earnest he was irresistible. He hailed a hansom. They hopped in. To the park!

VII

"Haven't I been rather discursive?" he had asked of her. "I don't think so," she had curtly contradicted. Forsooth, she didn't think that he had been discursive. She was rather disappointed. The brilliant verbal fireworks she had been taught by her brother to expect from Ulick had fizzled—she thought. It was only that night, after she had put Dolly to sleep, that she assembled her memories of the afternoon and then she realized the conversation might be truthfully described as discursive; fragmentary would be a better word. He is nice, she ruminated. Now you dear naughty doll, don't you pretend to be asleep when I

see one of your eyes watching me . . . little sneak, I believe you are jealous. . . . Oh! he is so nice, Dolly . . . She buried her face in the cool bed linen—There! I'll whip you for your mean jealousy—I'm fond of Ulick—my great Jewel of a man. . . . Dolly's head was lost under a pillow. Mona fell into a dreamless slumber. . . . She said nothing next morning to her mother about the impromptu luncheon and casually remarked that she would go for a walk in the afternoon, not far, she added. She didn't think it necessary to tell that she was going to the Metropolitan Museum, a few blocks away, there to meet Ulick Invern, who had promised to show her Manet's "Boy with a Sword" and to describe the personality of the painter, with whom he had been acquainted in Paris. It was to be a glorious afternoon devoted entirely to art. Ulick was so artistic and she so ignorant. . . .

VIII

The modulation into an easy-going friendship was not difficult for these young people. An autumn without parallel, in its days of mellowness mingled with invigorating frosts, passed on rapid pinions. They did not bid Old Time to pause in his flight; the rhythms of their ardent blood were too insistent. They ceased to reason. Their affective life ruled. In the case of Ulick there was a throw-back to his Anglo-

Saxon origins. His Parisian training and aptitudes melted in the gentle heat of new experiences. I am an American, after all, he often told himself, therefore sentimental, and sentimentality and sensuality are never far asunder. She, on the contrary, is a cérébrale, neither tepid nor tempestuous. Yet those moments when she seems on the verge of hysteria—I mean, when she goes off on those gales of laughter. She is oversexed, no doubt about that. She would rather discuss sex-problems than eat. A curious combination. So is her brother. He, too, likes to talk on forbidden subjects. People who have no outlet for their emotions are bound to brood over them and to unbosom themselves without realizing it. Steady, Ulick, steady! I'm not in love or I shouldn't be analyzing my feelings. Is she a trifle smitten? That way lies self-conceit. But she does like to be in my company, and I prefer hers to any woman's—yes, even to Easter's, who never gave anyone a chance to breathe, so busy was she with herself. What egotists these mortals be! Puck should have said. I wonder what Easter is doing now? That wonderment had become a leading motive with him of late. He bitterly reflected that since the dramatic, the fatal, day in New Hampshire, she had not permitted him the slightest familiarity. She had kissed him on the steamer the day of her departure, but then she had kissed Tom, Dick and Harry with equal readiness, though she hadn't whispered to them: "You dear old

Jewel." The memory of her voice, low, mysterious, tender, still fired his blood. I'm afraid I'm a sensual man. Be virtuous and you'll be bilious! He pondered the wise adage. Is physical love only a matter of hygiene? he asked himself. Tumescence; detumescence, as Havelock Ellis says. It's high time I went out on the trail after a few scalps. I'm getting a bit stale.

IX

That winter they met nearly every day. But she didn't invite him to call at her home. He couldn't ask a reason for this strange omission. My intentions are perfectly honourable. I've told her I wouldn't marry the best woman even though she were the last of her sex on the globe. I've also told her that a man should never live under the same roof with his mistress; in that case what would be the difference between marriage and concubinage; one would be as stupid as the other. Poor Emma Bovary found out from experience that men and women bound by any bond live in the land of platitudes. I told her—heaven forgive my candor!—that I changed mistresses every three months, that the instant I found myself falling in love with one I got a new one. Boasts by a boaster. What is it that interests nice girls in irregular lives? I wonder. The inside of a brothel is not so interesting as an

abattoir, where as Huysmans used to say—love is slain at a stroke, and the stroke usually costs the man a twenty-franc piece. But these girls don't realize the crudeness of such lives. Mystery. That's the attraction. The unknown. Silly, miserable women who go to bed the same night with a half dozen men—is that romantic! Demi-vierges, Marcel Prévost called the American girls, for some reason best known to himself. Yet I've met respectable married women who went to Paris crazy to see the sights, that is, certain sights. The puberty of adultery? Maxim's soon bored them. From the organized obscenities of Montmartre they went to the "peep-holes" only to see another show staged for imbeciles with a filthy curiosity. What is it? Mona, dear decent child, agrees with me that promiscuous married life is the most deadly blow of all romance. She simply won't recognize evil as evil, only as vulgarity—worse, as stupidity. I absolutely agree with her in that matter.

But it was not such plain sailing for Mona through this unfamiliar and uncharted land of emotion. She had a hard time with that temperament of hers. I'm glad they give it such a name as temperament, she said. Robert Louis Stevenson calls love a mixture of pruriency and curiosity, which suggests a horrid itch. Young men have an easier time than girls, who must sit and sizzle while down in some sub-cellar of their being they hear the faint growlings of the untamed

animal. Once unleashed it jumps all barriers, and then—well, then, the fat's in the fire. Mona shivered, a pleasing shiver of anticipation. Why not bravely go to her parents and confess that she loved Ulick? He was a presentable young man, of social standing, with abundant means—evidently; for outside of his critical work he seems to do little except to spend money, not a negligible quantity, with her—and, finally, he was liked, and likely very much by Milt. Some perverse devil lurking in the depths of her being bade her stay silent. Was it romance, sloppy, slimy sentimentality, after all? She couldn't say. She only knew that she wanted to keep her secret, that she didn't wish to marry, that she loved to be near the big, good-hearted young chap with the blue eyes; yes, why not tell the truth—she was wild to be loved by him. Everything. A young woman brought up in the practice of all the proprieties—save church going—by a mother who idolized her! Nevertheless, she was ready to throw her bonnet over the windmill like the veriest street slut. Where her maidenly reserve! She had none when self-confessing. Ulick had said to her, I think you were brought up on the wrong kind of reading. Do you force me to stick to Hannah More or Self-Help? she had impertinently demanded. You might do worse. Bernard Shaw is poor nourishment for a girl with too much imagination, he retorted. Wrong again, she said, I've absolutely no imagination. I'm only enthusiastic.

And you have said that without enthusiasm life would be unsupportable.

Thus far the outward expression of their mutual affection had been conventional. They went to picture exhibitions, the horse-show at the Garden saw them many times, and also opera and theatre matinées; but, strictly speaking, they were never alone. He always left her at her house door. There were no twilight corridors, darkened vestibules, no sudden corners in entries where they might embrace. He did smuggle her hand into his at the theatre when the lights were lowered; during entr'actes they were a well-bred couple. Opportunity, which is the thief of virtue—sometimes—hadn't appeared on the scene. Occasionally, when walking after a copious luncheon, she would complain of enervation and her eyes would swim with mystic languor. He, fearing that she might think him virtuous, boasted of laborious nights of vice. She seemed to believe him and secretly applauded his conduct. No wonder young men can bob up with such smug faces when they call on nice girls. Oh, yes, they are quite virtuous. No fear of their misbehaving themselves. Their other "lady" friends have made them safe—housebroken, she added with a smile over the phrase. I believe grim law causes more suffering than license. When she communicated this original idea to Ulick he frankly asked her:

"See here, Mona, do you ever expect to have a child?"

"I'm crazy for one, for two"—and she related the story of Dolly. He was at once sympathetic, slightly to her surprise. "It reminds me," he said, "of two French friends of mine. Married, but no children, though they were much desired. For several years they played at parenthood, they pretended they had a boy and a girl, very young, very troublesome, but beloved by them. They played this strange little comedy for several years. They never went out in the daytime without the 'children.' They held long conversations with them. They reproved, praised, admired, caressed them. At night when they visited the theatre or had a dinner they left their precious imaginary offspring in the care of an equally shadowy nurse, burdening her with all manner of instructions. And now comes the funny part of my story. A real child was born, a few years later, a second followed, and for all I know they may have had half a dozen since then. But those children of flesh and blood were not treated with the same sort of love the dream-children had received"—"Dream-children?" she repeated her eyes insistently seeking his, "what a pretty expression. Did you make it up?" "Certainly not. Haven't you read Charles Lamb's description of his dream-children, the children he never fathered—only dreamed of?" She didn't thank him for his explanation, but mused. "I should like to have some dream-children." "How many, five or six?" "No, two would be enough, a boy and a girl. I have already a

real child, didn't I tell you?" He pretended to be shocked. "A real baby you have?" "Yes, my Dolly. She's a troublesome charge. If I could only have two dream-children"—"Who is to be the father?" "You," she replied, and her naïve gravity impressed Ulick. "Won't you be the father of our twins?" Her voice was low, pleading, almost intense. They were sitting in the park on an April afternoon. He caught one of her wrists. "By God," he exclaimed, "if I could only believe you meant it." "I do mean it, dear Ulick. We shall never marry, yet we may have children—dream-children, symbols of our friendship." "And what in the world do you mean by saying that we shall never marry?" His accent was one of astonishment and no little pique. She gazed demurely at her well-shaped hands.

"Didn't you say that you had to change mistresses every three months? And what about the obscene promiscuity of married life!" He went into a bad humour at once and impatiently answered: "Yes, I did say it and you know enough of life to know it was all brag. I've no mistresses—" "What! no mistresses, not one?" she blankly inquired. He didn't turn a hair. "Not one. I love only one woman in the world now. It's Mona Milton. I needn't tell her that." "No," she replied without affectation. "We do care for each other. Yet, Jewel, why harp on marriage?" He endeavoured not to show his surprise. To atavism, and to

the Bartlett side of his ancestry, must be set down the reason for this surprise, and a faint, though well-defined, feeling of dissent. Really, a young girl should not say such things to a young man no matter how modern, how advanced she is; no matter if she is fond of him; and the curious part of the thing is that Mona does not boast being advanced or modern, nor, indeed, anything but a real girl.

She noted his confusion, and helped him over the stile of perplexity. "Ulick, let's have dream-twins. I'll assume all the responsibility, all the cares, only let's have them—now." He glanced superstitiously about him as if he feared her speech would be overheard. And her home not ten minutes away! She divined the cause of his embarrassment and grasping his hand in her soothing clasp she asked with the naïveté of a childish mother: "What shall we call them, our darlings?" "That's important," he declared, humouring her. "Let me see. The boy? I have it. Shamus. My full name in baptism is Ulick Shamus Fitzgibbon Desmond Invern. It's a mouthful. I am the namesake of my uncle, my father's elder brother, now the head of our house and present Marquis of Invern and Desmond. Yes, there's a Marquis in the family, a poverty-stricken one at that, poor but proud. But it will do me no good, for he has a quiverful of children. My cousin, St. Alban, his heir, is my age, a regular prig. So. dear, it will be Shamus, if you don't mind." She

nodded. Shamus would do. Now for the girl. He again made the nomination. "She is called Grane." Mona rebelled. "Why such an unusual name?" "Don't you remember the white horse of Brunnhilde in 'Siegfried'?" "Certainly, and I also remember the white horses in Rosmersholm which foretold trouble." "I like Grane, and you will like her, too." He was so firm that she acceded. "All right, dear, and now what are you going to do with the pair since they are born?" He took out his watch and started up. "Past five, and I've a first-night on. Good-bye, darling Mona," and he kissed her upon the mouth for the first time in the twilight and with a moon like an effaced silver coin looking at them over the synagogue. It was a consecration, she whispered; my first kiss. Then aloud: "Good-bye—darling—I'll take Shamus and Grane home, the dears might take cold. Good-bye, Ulick, my husband and father of our children." As he strode away, not daring to look back, he ruminated: That's a case of suppressed maternal instinct. Mona ought to be married or—or—steady, boy! Else you are in it either way you jump.

X

The new Ibsen play enjoyed a stormy première. After he had sounded its praise and expressed his personal opinion that critics who thought to the contrary

were imbeciles not worth the powder to blow them hellward, Ulick went to the Utopian Club, there to relax. He ran into Edgar Saltus as he entered. That writer was then at his brilliant apogee. He had published The Anatomy of Negation, The Philosophy of Disenchantment, The Truth About Tristram Varick, and Mr. Incoul's Misadventure, and was enjoying with his ironic humour the row raised by the moral bellboys of criticism over his incomparable style and incomparable unmorality. Ulick had been his admirer in Paris and told the aristocratic author so in no measured manner. Saltus liked the young man and encouraged him. "Naturally, you should have remained in Paris. Here you commit spiritual suicide. I don't care what De Gourmont advised. You have the soul of a cosmopolitan. There is no nationality in art any more than there is democratic art. Demos dislikes art as much as he does a bath-tub. Soap and social equality are akin. His self-constituted champion, Walt Whitman, who wrote some stunning head-lines, not to mention his catalogue of the human genitals, is not welcome to Mr. & Mrs. Demos. Longfellow about fills their lyric cup to overflowing. However, I was about to write you. I've an invitation for you." Then he went into details. Ulick was delighted. "Of course, I'll accept the invitation. It's very kind of you to think of me. What a jolly party it will be. I'm getting staler and staler in this town of my mother's. That party may

bring back a whiff of dear old Paris." They shook hands and parted. Ulick went to the Maison Felicé, across Madison Square park, and after he had gone to bed he couldn't sleep; yet the noise of poker-chips in the next room didn't keep him awake. It's those damnable dream-brats, he irritably exclaimed and though it was long past two he donned a dressing gown and sat down to his desk in the music-room.

XI

Either I've made a mistake in coming to New York, or else I'm going soft in the upper-story, he said aloud, as he opened his portfolio, crammed with papers, some scribbled over, some blank, some carefully folded. There is Edgar Saltus, who knows life in a broader sense, perhaps better, than De Gourmont—he says I made a mistake. Is Paris my real home, and am I deracinated, as Maurice Barrès calls it, and only transplanted in America? Ah! abominable music-critics' jargon, how glad I am to have escaped your adjectives and repulsive technical terms. That is no way to find one's individuality, overpraising vain screaming sopranos, voluptuous contraltos—I wonder why contraltos are more temperamental than sopranos? worst of all those monkey tenors, with their lascivious bleatings like goats in rut. Why do women admire the miserable, whitewash whinnying of tenor singers?

Baritones and basses are at least virile. Whether or not the tenor is castrated, he sings like a eunuch. No, they adore the eunuch voice in preference. Thank Apollo, I'm through with the lot, though dramatic criticism isn't much better. In the concert-world one at least listens to good music. A good play in New York is as rare as a well-written critique. I'm afraid that criticism is a poor proving-ground for one's intellectual development. Let me see what I've written the last few months. Only notations. This romantic rot must stop. Mona—oh, Mona is all right, but the waste of time, the waste of emotion. What of those factors?

No women! Balzac had sternly warned Théophile Gautier. The Emperor Honoré did not practise what he preached. Compact of sex himself he was ever preoccupied with petticoats. La crise juponnière overtook him once a week and oftener. Ulick recalled an anecdote of the great man when, after he had succumbed to the blind fury of eroticism—a chambermaid, or somebody feminine had crossed his path—he went about the boulevards bemoaning to his friends: "J'ai perdu un livre, j'ai perdu un livre!" his theory being that an orgasm valued an entire story, and in his case it may have. Save your seed for nobler purposes than copulation. That is the wisdom of the sages. And the transposition so painfully accomplished by the saints of all times, climes and creeds, has ever impressed mankind as a deed heroic. Women secretly

admire the chaste man. He is a sum of ineluctable forces. Men deride the Josephs and Parsifals, not crediting them with self-control. But that is nonsense, asserted Ulick. A priest here and there succumbs, but as a rule, and notwithstanding the atrocious martyrdom of unsatisfied legitimate desires, the sacerdotal man emerges from the trial a conqueror. As for women, they are the self-contained sex. No one knows precisely what happens in the alchemy of their emotions. Some burn their smoke, others blaze coram publico; but the majority hide this sort of light under a bushel of hypocritical reservations.

I mustn't waste myself in little spasms then. How about correspondence? "ça forme le style," Balzac told Gautier, and rather grudged him that concession. Ulick smiled. He knew his master-weakness, his vice. He knew that when the flesh moved him the spirit took a holiday. No self-abnegation for him, no transposition to his cortical cells of his sexual longing. Like a bull he saw red everywhere. It's a pity all the same, he sighed. I should marry, raise a family and be unfaithful to my wife not more than twice weekly. The programme of the majority of good fathers, good husbands. And the American man is the worst of the lot. A regular Turk plus a religious humbug. And some clergymen! Town bulls. Over in Brooklyn they put up statues to their piety—and virility. Bon! They should. A womanly woman is admirable, and she is

not rare. A virile man is as rare nowadays as a chaste one.

What an enormous faculty of inattention I possess! I wander, I stray into the queerest pastures. What's this I've written? Philanthropy is inverted egotism. True. All the immortal turpitudes are to be found in the ranks of the philanthropists. A pecuniary heresy. The latrines of my soul were overflowing in Paris. Am I purer in New York? Here we buy our ecstasy, rent that brief syncope called passion. What's the difference? It's the début that counts. The fury of enlacement leaves me a cynic. I wonder if women feel the same? That eternal triangle of theirs. And the pensile penguin of the eternal masculine. Wicked Walt has in The Children of Adam made some stunning phrases about the procreative organs. People who rave over his rotten poetry wouldn't read him if he hadn't been an exhibitionist in print. No one with a particle of taste seduces a young girl nowadays; they wait till she is married—it saves time and trouble. "Sir," roared old Doctor Johnson, "maidenheads are for ploughboys." Oh, the delicious, pernicious conversation that depraves. Thought deforms. Seduction by starlight sometimes ends in a police court with a fornication and bastardy charge. Anyhow, we must have our psychic satisfactions, else spiritual atony. Why this mania of certitude in the choice of a phrase? Pure dandyism of style. Goethe said in his Truth and Poetry, "All herein

is true; nothing exact." That is fine in its implications. Stained-glass socialism! Most of it is nothing else. Anything to keep out the daylight of reality. Like the tigress that has tasted human flesh and blood so is the woman who knows man: neither are satisfied but with human prey. That's why widows remarry or—: why seduced girls "fall" again—though Ulick smiled at that silly word—why, convents are peopled by disillusioned souls —and there is a waiting list!

Why does man crave self-abasement? Pascal is an example. Cæsar wept when, after watching a ballet of beautiful girls dance, he saw them killed. But he didn't weep from pity, but with ecstasy because of their beauty. The æsthetic temperament. Love is not a sentiment, it's a sensation. The Japanese know that. An orchestra of sensations in which the silences are sonorous. What an Iliad of Imbecility is the history of mankind. My idealistic anxiety over my affairs is proof positive of their pettiness. We never escape the prison of self, though we attempt to project our personality into the thoughts of another; this process is called sympathy. But a thought and a thing are identical. There is no thought-stuff different from thing-stuff, says William James. We can never know anything outside of ourselves. Oh! the sour hair, the dark breath of these psychologists! In the cuisine of love there are flavours for all tastes. Else ugly women wouldn't be sought after. Are there any ugly women?

my brother Oswald used to say that once a pillow over their face all women were alike to him. Discriminating person, Oswald. His mind must be a slop-jar of the infinite. How mirific to mingle our essences. What immaculate perception is required to pick the precise woman with whom to "amalgamate our sublimes." The vagabondage of my soul through the universe, fluid, profound, and choral, is a gift denied most men and women. Yet it is at my threshold for the asking. My conceit is character—I think; yours is merely apoplectic. The lassitudes of love are divine. The human plant does not best flourish in the sunlight of success; it needs darkness, sin, sorrow, crime, to bring it to a rich maturity. The ignoble dung of miseries demands the spade of adversity. And Flaubert had said that the ignoble is the lower slope of the sublime. Which is consoling. As Rabelais would remark: I am an abstractor of quintessences.

I once longed to unhook the sun from the wall of the firmament and now I would fain crawl into a certain sultry crevice. The prism of desire deceives the Jasons in search of the golden—or brunette—fleece. I have made love to virtuous women who gave me the sensation of the force and felicity that attends the commission of a rape. And the pure woman who teases is worse than a streetwalker. A course of anatomy on a pillow, says a fellow cynic. Ah! her rapture of her little solitudes, her ivory tower, her mimique in

the "naked war." In this life all the rest is gesticulation or secular sorrow. Ideas may be domesticated like cats. The pathos of distance—memorable phrase of Nietzsche—boasts its obverse, the bathos of propinquity—Walter Littlefield's mot. Some men look like a carefully pared thumb-nail; perhaps they are; anyhow, it's better than being a noble débris. Lawyers earn their bread in the sweat of their browbeating. Fais aux autres ce que tu ne veux pas qu'ils te fassent! Pity is inutile. Every one of our actions is an addition. Why, then, worry over free-will? Not to animal life nor to machinery must we go when studying the human heart, but to vegetables and flowers. I believe that romantic feelings are much less common than we imagine; the vast majority of the race mimic the gestures of the stage and fiction. Food, shelter, fornication, the fight for daily existence—these are the prime levers: not sentiment. We fool ourselves. We take our religion and sentiment in small doses. There are souls of prey like birds of prayer. Few women are in harmony with the moral landscape. What music is comparable to the exquisite sighs of a woman satisfied? The orchestra of her soul and sensations plays a triumphant fortissimo, and what a cruel, piercing note is the supreme spasm; the entire gamut of dolour is compressed therein.

We owe the world a living, not t'other way round. How I loathe Gounod's Ave Maria with its slimy

piety, slimy echoes from the brothel. This vibrion of music, Gounod, never touched masterpieces without blighting them. Think of the Bach prelude accompanying the song. Think of mighty Faust maimed, tortured to make an operatic holiday. The Truth, so-called, is not necessarily tonic to all souls. Free-thought is never free; sometimes it is not thought; and it is usually inverted dogmatism. The woman who gives an elderly man the illusion of virility will always be sought after. Man is the only animal who can imagine what is not. We think backwards, but live forwards, said the Scandinavian mystic, Soren Kerkegaard. There are no illegitimate children; babies are always born legitimately. Ask the women. What medical pathos. Is it not better to fall into the hands of a murderer than into the dreams of a lustful woman? That's Nietzsche. He never made the blunder of lying down in the dirty straw of the sex-trough. That's why he wrote as if with a diamond on a slate of crystal. Yet he could say in the same breath that chastity is a virtue with some, with the majority almost a vice. Every man knows that a woman has a dozen different ways to make him happy, and a hundred to make him unhappy. Nous nous promenions nos préjugés! Sounds like Stendhal, doesn't it? I imitated him when I paraphrased it in English: Let us promenade our prejudices. Just as I gave Baudelaire the credit of a line he never saw, though one I believe he would

have approved. Here it is: Lo! the Lesbians, their sterile sex advancing. Curious, isn't it, how Baudelaire and Swinburne loved to write about Lesbians? The influence of the Sapphic legend, I fancy, not alone because of the sweet inversion.

Ah me! groaned the young man, as the light filtered through the curtains, here's another day, and I've been wasting good sleep over this twaddle instead of being in bed. But I couldn't sleep. Too much black coffee. It doesn't matter what. Only I wonder how many of these phrases are my own. I don't believe in originality. George Moore is quite right when he derides ideas; their expression is the only worth while to the artist. Truth—error? This side of the Pyrenees—and the other side. Map-morality. He paused, and ruefully reflected: Nor can I say much for the formal quality of these phrases. Ah! the precious pagodas of prose, pagan and subtle, built by those master artificers, Renan, Anatole France, Huysmans, Barrès. Nevertheless, Stendhal, who wrote drily, whose books are psychological labyrinths, is their ruling sun, one that shines in a frosty heaven of his own fashioning. De Gourmont—a prober of the soul. Bourget, another, though more mundane, decorative. Maurice Barrès is a metaphysical Chopin in his feeling for nuance. He promenades his incertitudes through many pages of perverse, cadenced prose. But perverse. He has now deserted his ivory tower for another illusion like his

"culte du moi";—nationalism, patriotism, as opposed to egoism and cosmopolitanism. Well, I'm following in his footsteps, trying to become a sturdy American citizen in my native city—where I wasn't born. I'll stick. I like mince-pie, baseball and a good rough-neck prize-fight. I must be a real Yankee.

As for these notes—heaven help any reader if I ever make of them a chapter in a book. That book! Fiction or criticism, or both? The novel as a literary form is stale. I should like to write a story, not all empty incident, not yet all barren analysis. Neither Henry James, nor old Dumas—I'm not flying high, am I?—but one in which the idealogies of Barrès and the concrete narrative of De Maupassant would be merged. A second Dickens, a second Thackeray are inconceivable. A soul-biography framed in harmonious happenings—Ah! what an ideal is Walter Pater, who, when his critical prose plays second-fiddle to his fiction, will be called the master-psychologist of them all. Marius, Imaginary Portraits, Gaston—those are unapproachable. Pater has revealed to us the rarest of souls. He achieves ecstasy in a prose-music never sounded since the Greeks. As Tristan is to Aïda, so Marius to all fiction—oh, but now I'm going off my handle again, grumbled Ulick. Vanity Fair and Pickwick are good enough for me, even if I do admire Balzac, Flaubert, Stendhal, Mérimée and the Russians. The man who doesn't read Pickwick once a year is

fit for treason. If only Dostoyevsky, the greatest psychologist since Balzac, had mastered the compression of Turgenev? What a scooper of souls. There's too much descriptive padding in modern novels, too many landscapes, not enough characterization. I don't mean descriptive characterization—the clothes, the gait and the eternal simper of the pulchritudinous gum-chewing heroine—but a searching characterization that not only paints your man without but also within. Think of Julien Sorel in Red and Black. Not the master that is Tolstoy could better Stendhal. A detestable character? Admitted, but what has that to do with the vitality of his characters, the validity of his portraiture? Too much cluttered-up with futile things our novel reminds me of a drawing-room which you can't see because of the furniture or the bric-à-brac, so crowded is it with everything.

To avoid conventional chapter transitions, to write swiftly with weight, emotions, also succinctly; to cram every inch of space with ideas as well as action—the fiction of the future—all this I fear is not in abundance. Henry James is the man who may solve the difficulty. Flaubert swore that the characters should reveal themselves by their acts, and loathed long-winded analysis, though he abused his powers of description. It is narrative that is the pride and despair of his successors. Henry James says character is plot, but plot is not character. That's my notion. And Cardinal Newman

was also correct when he gently insinuated that no one could make psychology easy reading. He didn't live long enough to read William James. Lord, Lord! And we go afield to burn incense under foreign nostrils and here we can boast of two such brothers of genius as William and Henry James. Magnificent genius. But to bed. I'm afraid I'm a confused thinker. I wonder what Easter—no, I mean Mona—is doing now? Encore la femme! He fell asleep and dreamed of a strange blonde creature, all fun and fire and flame.

XII

Ulick was shown into a room filled with carbon photographs by a coloured butler in sober livery. It was an ante-chamber on the first floor of a large, old-fashioned house on a side-street off the Avenue somewhere in the thirties; he forgot just where. When he entered the atelier, huge in size, he was greeted by a half dozen men he knew; some he had chummed with in Paris; one, Robbie Sanderson—the Bullrush, he was nicknamed—had been an intimate of Oswald Invern's. He, too, was a painter. The host, Ned Haldane, called the Zephyr, because he was so fat and light on his feet, welcomed the newcomer, as did big Stanley the sculptor and popular man-around-town. It was a group congenial to Ulick. All were graduated from the Parisian art treadmill; men who took a liberal view

of life, men without puritan morals and with charming manners.

"We are not all here yet," proclaimed the Zephyr, "but I hope soon will be. We are only to be a dozen." "A baker's dozen," corrected Stanley, "for there's Jim the butler." "Oh, no, my boy, Jim isn't to do any butlering in this room tonight. He'll be busy in the cork-room with the fizz. Besides he is a respectable married man and we mustn't make him forget his dusky spouse." The Zephyr laughed. "Are you going to give us another pony-ballet tonight? What's the lark, Ned?" asked Robbie Sanderson. "Never you mind, lad, be patient and just stick to the cocktails. What—you won't drink anything?" pursued Haldane when Ulick refused. He seemed puzzled, as if he were about to blurt out, "Then what the devil did you come for?" but he smiled and bowed. He liked the looks of the young aristocrat sponsored by Edgar Saltus and of whom he had heard so much from friends in Paris. The bell rang. A message from Saltus begging off. Illness the excuse. "I bet he's working on the chapter of a novel—he's not sick," laughed Haldane. Ulick's face was long. The Bullrush clapped him on the back and reassured him by whispering, "Don't worry, Ulick. There will be lots of fun. You won't be lonely. Girls!" The painter significantly winked. Again the bell rang —furiously. The Zephyr went out and received noisy

salutes. Evidently belated guests. Ulick, now thoroughly bored, looked around him.

The studio was not particularly inviting; it was almost bare. No pictures, a few easy divans, the floor covered with rugs of fabulous weave—he recognized that—and nothing in the middle of the room, no tables, no preparatory symptoms of a banquet, much less a saturnalia. Tapestries adorned the walls. The doors were draped. He was disappointed at the absence of Saltus and annoyed with himself for coming. He did not join the men clustered about the buffet. He felt isolated and was mentally casting about what excuse would serve him to escape, when the room was invaded by the gang. There were introductions—not many. The crowd belonged to one family, the Seven Arts. And they were at home. Drinks speedily disappeared down parched gullets. There was a punch bowl, and early as was the hour the air was heavy with cigarette smoke. Haldane clapped his hands. Silence. Jim and his fat wife entered carrying a small table. Then another, and another, till six were placed around the room, close to the walls. Each table was set for two persons. Flowers, silver, napery and porcelain. Hurrah! came from a dozen throats. As usual Ned Haldane had royally spread himself. Anticipation floated in the air. After a minute's conference with the butler the master of ceremonies bade him good night. "And now get out, Jim, and don't show your shiny face till noon

tomorrow." Jim grinned and withdrew. He knew the ropes. Haldane cried: "Gentlemen, please be seated. The comedy is about to begin." Then he blew a silver whistle.

Folding-doors opened and there slowly defiled through them a band of beautiful girls, bearing silver platters. These girls were quite naked save for a scarf which depended from their shoulders, wound under their breasts and traversed their thighs. Blonde and brunette; all the intermediate flesh-tints. There were a dozen and not one was more than twenty. Their hair was filleted and their feet in sandals. A dazzling vision from some old Greek processional cult, thought Ulick as he clapped his palms in company with his companions. "My God, I'm hungry," roared Robbie, and the laughter was deafening. "Listen to the gourmand," commented the Zephyr. "Here I've gathered the finest choir of virgins he ever saw and the beggar yells for food. What guts you boast, Rob." The silver platters held hors d'œuvres of quality. No sakuzka at a Russian dinner could show so many exotic delicacies. With these appetizers were tiny glasses of aperitives. The virgins vanished, only to re-enter with fresh dishes. No soup was served. Oysters and shell fish. Birds. Salads. One-half the band carried bottles. Champagne of the dryest sort. Ulick was hungry enough to forget that he was being waited upon by a plump blonde nude angel and ate as unconcernedly as if she were a

plain waitress, clothed and from the hills of New Hampshire. Parisian training hath its uses. The candles in sconces at the side were grateful to the eyes, the rich yet subdued tones of the tapestry and Persian rugs evoked a harmonious atmosphere. To the memory of Ulick, furnished with images of European picture-galleries, there came Venetian episodes, festal suppers, and the mellow debaucheries of Tintoretto's days and the days of the Doges. Sensualist as he was he experienced a slight sensation of satiety.

They had reached the cognac and were now smoking, gabbling. His table companion was the Bullrush who already felt his wine. He saluted the virgins by their names, and when he forgot them he invented new ones; sometimes his inventions weren't tasteful. One girl, fatter than the others, he called rumpsteak and patted her when she passed. But it was a well-trained orchestra; not by the movement of an eyebrow did she notice his rudeness. After a brief interlude, during which everyone bawled or guzzled, there was heard the premonitory tinkling of little bells. The twelve virgins emerged in Indian file; they had changed their scanty costume; they no longer wore sashes. Instead, sleigh-bells were fastened to their ankles, and to the insistent clicking of castanets they danced the Dance of the Seven Devils. This spawn of Satan, these devil's daughters, had been drilled in the technique of the ballet infernal. Monotone of

castanets and tufted footballs framed rhythmic obscenities. At times Ulick gasped, and he had been in Oriental brothels where sex is become a delirium. The Ctéis was appropriately worshipped. They sprawled and postured, they reared their polished posteriors in porcine rhythms, as if to invite their brethren, who ringed them with applause, urging them to audaciously lascivious acts. The air was charged with cigarettes, the acrid smell of wine and odour di femina. Ulick's head began to ache.

Suddenly from languorous weavings, from legs and arms in unholy embrace, the current changed to crazy gallopings. The dancing mania seized the men, all except the Zephyr, who leaned against a wall and coolly regarded the spectacle, surely not a novel one to him. Ulick was caught by the plump blonde and furiously whirled. She was an enticing houri with gold-coloured eyes and scarlet lips—rouged. Her breath was extra-dry. He turned his head away as she repeatedly kissed him. But the heated curves of her finely modelled torso made him a helpless prisoner. Sweetness exhaled from her. Young, pretty, absolutely depraved, she had fancied the handsome youth who sat so still and haughty, coldly refusing her libations and unconsciously frowning when Robbie Sanderson pinched her cheeks. She drank with the others each time they went out to the service room, and she found her tongue as the night wore on in frenzied intoxica-

tion. The men were in their shirtsleeves. Everyone sang. The heat and noise were terrific. And all this pagan revelry in a drab, respectable quarter of New York! No matter, Ulick breathlessly exclaimed, it's a relief from the accursed hypocrisy of puritanical Yankeedom. Again the whistle sounded. A lull followed. The girls, their smooth bodies glistening with moisture, slipped away. A fresh attack was made on the wine stacked in ice-pails.

"What's up?" asked a jolly, white-bearded old reprobate, a great swell, whose granddaughter had "come out" that winter at a débutante's ball of exceeding splendour. Haldane smiled. "Wait!" he begged. However, no one seemed to care. The intermezzo proved a breathing-spell. Ulick debated whether he would be committing an offence against good manners if he deserted. He could pretend to go into the anteroom—but there was a hush. A trestle was borne in by the twelve virgins. Upon it was a monstrous pie, a fabulous confection, the crust ermine-white, like the souls of the votive maidens, icy as their virtue, and surmounted by an iridescent plumage of flowers. The pagan priestesses, who with difficulty carried this offering to Ceres—or was it Bacchus!—had once more changed their costume; each wore a dainty liberty cap in tricolor. They sang, and their voices were heavy with wine, passion and incipient catarrh. At a signal they placed their burden upon the middle rug, then

encircled it. Someone clapped hands. The top of the pie was thrown off, birds, doves, canaries and nightingales, flew out in every direction seeking shelter and piteously piping to the flappings of their wings. A shining child of exquisite beauty arose in the centre of the pie and made graceful weaving motions. She, too, was newly-born. Her breasts were lilliputian, tender, rose-coloured. Her evasive hips proclaimed precocious puberty and Jason himself would not have become inflamed over further search for the toison d'or. As a picture she is admirable, thought Ulick; as a spectacle decidedly suggestive. He was wrong. There was not the slightest evocation of evil in the posed gestures of this pretty maid; the evil lay in the lewd imaginings of the men, blasé from indulgence, brainsick with wine, their nerves taut from morbid imaginings. The Zephyr went to the sacrificial pastry and lifted the pink darling to the floor, then cradling her in his arms he disappeared behind the arras to the choral accompaniment of his jeering guests. The storm burst. A tornado of twirling flesh, the atmosphere punctured by shrieks of laughter, and growlings of wildmen. It became too much for Ulick and he begged his girl to desist. She had sunk on the floor and imploringly grasped his hand. Kneeling, he told her to dress and he would go home with her. For some reason his proposition pleased. She went to the retiring-room, he

to get his own things. Their presence was not missed on the carnal battlefield.

"What's the difference?" he asked himself in disgust as he found his top-coat and sat down to wait for the girl, "what's the difference between this crowd, cultured, artistic men and pretty sluts, and the ugly howling fanatics up in New England?" Inevitably the image of Easter arose in his slightly smoky brain. What tremendous minutes they had been when he held her close to him in the mystic blackness; held and possessed her. The present was but the mimique of a monkey-cage. No enchantment of the senses beyond optical titillation. Without strong drink such carnivals of turpitude appal. He almost regretted the champagne. He hadn't long to wait. The girl appeared, slightly tipsy, but very appealing in her innocence—for her youth made her innocent, notwithstanding her frivolity. He recognized her with difficulty, so genteel her externals. A picture-hat shaded her baby face. She was in evening dress, ivory-coloured silk cut low revealing a young bosom. Charming, said Ulick, and how much more provocative her charm when properly clothed. "Oh, Ulick, you are such a dear to wait so long. Let's go home. I love you already." Drunk or sober, she spoke with the accent of truth. As they went out, the door opened by the discreet butler, his features as impassive as an undertaker's, big, red-haired Stanley spied them and joyously shouted after them:

"Good-bye, Ulick. You've picked a winner! Dora is a darling. Look out for the newspaper buzzards. There's a bunch of them at the corner. They will try to flash-light you!" As the street door closed behind them, a night-hawk drove to the curb. Ulick bundled Dora in and asked her the address. Up on Lexington Avenue somewhere in the nineties. A tall apartment house. The driver nodded, and turned his horse's head eastward. Footsteps were heard. Ulick peeped through the back glass. "It's the newspaper men and some policemen. I hope they won't pull the place." "Never fear! the Zephyr knows how to butter their bun!" replied Dora, snuggling close to him. "No cops will ever enter that house, but I suppose the newspapers will print the shocking news. They never got in yet, but they will tell what happened just the same. In their minds." And then she promptly fell asleep, her head on his shoulder. She smelt of champagne. Another wasted night, he sighed, as the ramshackle cab rattled through the empty avenue, grey dawn thrusting its cold nozzle into the dreary city-scape. He, too, began to doze. . . .

XIII

Through muddy dreams he struggled into half-consciousness. He fought with naked spectres for the possession of Mona. There were centaurs but they battled among themselves. He ran through endless vistas

of magnificent halls, as full of flowers as a hothouse, and as he ran, himself naked, the flowers became alluring nude women, each with a pie and gluttonously eating. It was a nightmare full of mare's nests. Nothing happened, yet every moment was fraught with tragedy—the tragedy of indigestion. Ulick struggled. He put out a hand. It touched human flesh, a face, a nose. His chest was oppressed by a strange weight. Something living lay across him, the owner of the face. He could feel regular breathing. Releasing an arm he rubbed his eyes, trying hard to locate himself. Who the woman so closely embracing him? A woman without peradventure of a doubt. It was not the first time that he had awakened in the company of a stranger; toujours la femme! Such happenings are not unusual in the life of adventurous youth. If he had been a drinking man he could have understood his slipping memory. Drinking? Wine? There was a distinct scent of stale alcohol about him, and then he realized that it was the hot breath of Dora. He gently lifted her head and placed it on the pillow. She murmured, nothing intelligible. Ulick greatly desired to know the time, greatly desired to bathe, dress and escape. It is an instinct of a healthy animal that as soon as it has coupled with its female it hastens away to sleep elsewhere. Homo sapiens invented affection, and then followed sentimentality. He got out of bed without disturbing the girl. The room was in semi-

obscurity. Tiptoeing, he reached one of the heavily curtained windows. Peeping out he saw that it must be midday, or later. What to do? He tried several door-knobs, finally found himself in a bath-room, where he speedily switched on light. His clock told him a quarter past eleven, but it had run down. Someone tried the door and asked: "Are you up, dearie? What time is it, I wonder? Oh, my poor head! I must have a cup of tea or I'll go crazy." Dearie! It was the classic phrase in all its perfection, consecrated by the generations of women, thought Ulick, and he called out: "All right, Dora. I'll be with you in two minutes."

But if he was in prime condition after a cold dip and a rub, his lady friend was not. The dainty Dora of the bacchanale had given place to a girl with puffy eyelids, discoloured complexion, bloated cheeks, sagging mouth, bad breath and tarnished glance. She was suffering, and hardly took time to twist her abundant hair into shape. Withal, a charming creature, as she stood in the daylight before her glass. An expression of discontent, bred of late hours and dissipation was contradicted by her young eyes, which incessantly smiled. She couldn't have been more than eighteen and her figure was nubile in its firm flesh and flowing contours. Decidedly a treasure-trove for an erotic man. Ulick went to her and she met him half-way. They embraced so desperately that she cried: "You are such a dear, you are such a man!" And again they made the

eternal gesture which mankind shares in common with his simian cousins at the Zoo or of the jungle. Youth must have its fling and the almighty has set his seal upon the multiplication of the species. And youth is better so employed than killing, or swindling, or guzzling, believed Ulick. Dora and Ulick were now thoroughly satisfied with one another and they made room in their consciousness for the play of a still more powerful instinct than reproduction. They were both hungry at the same time. Dora declared her headache vanished; Ulick, glad of the news, nevertheless wished she wouldn't address him with the inevitable "dearie." It sounded as naked as a cornet solo, this familiar appellation of the bordel. How unoriginal is man, how little he changes with the ages. In every tongue since the Babel scandal there is the equivalent of "dearie"; only, it is the property, this vocable, of the women of whom Dante wrote: "As the rill that runs from Bulicamé, to be portioned out among the sinful women. . . ." Ulick felt relieved when breakfast was announced.

Dora, thanks to her invincible youth, had partly recovered. Last night was a thousand years ago for her; only the present existed. Eternity is now. She wore a morning-gown as pretty as herself. And she was pretty; in his eyes she kept growing prettier each time he looked at her. He said so. She rushed round the table to kiss him. A tempestuous tempera-

ment. The breakfast-room was also the living-room. It was in a tasteful key, the furnishing banal. The view gave on a sea of roofs and spires. The park, with its sunburnt foliage, even then a green that had decayed for want of proper soil, lay across the west prospect. Dora informed him that the apartment was in the tallest building on upper Lexington Avenue. He believed her. There was one balcony, and of stone. Together they stood upon it smoking their first cigarette. Both were in an expansive mood. Strong tea, buttered toast and marmalade unloosed their tongues. Before they left the room she had rung and another pretty girl entered. She was a quadroon, lovely of hair, complexion, and with a profile that would not have been out of place on an antique medal. Ulick, who, Paris born and bred, had no "democratic" prejudices on the score of colour, admiringly stared at the girl as she noiselessly went about her task. Dora didn't like his look. "I see," she primly remarked, "you for the black and tan!" His inquiring expression, for he didn't understand, caused her to jerk her head in the direction of the maid. "I mean the slavey." "Oh!" he carelessly confessed, "I had a little chocolate-coloured mistress from Mauritius when I lived in Paris, and she wasn't half as pretty as this girl. Since Baudelaire set the fashion young French poets and artists have gone in for dusky concubines. I hear that at the time there was

such a demand that the Isle de France was positively emptied of those young women. You know, Dora, Manet painted a marvellous negress in his Olympe, the slim, nude courtesan with the depraved eyes in the Luxembourg. It ought to be in the Louvre—perhaps it will be some day—"

Dora pouted. "I don't care a snap for your old poets and their nigger brides. Give me a cigarette. Be nice to me. Can't you cuddle me a little bit?" Perfect, said he, mentally. The type, he reasoned, is confined to no particular race. Customs differ: women, never. He became impatient. He mentioned an afternoon engagement at 5 o'clock. It must be all that now, and he kissed Dora good-bye. She was nettled. "You are just a man, after all. You are all alike as peas in a pod. I expected you to take me out to dinner, then to some show. What a dull night I've before me." He was sorry. "I'll be back by seven," he assured her, and she gave a little cry of mingled joy and triumph, "You are a dear, Ulick. I'll be ready for you. Change your clothes. You look a sight in those togs." "Thanks—one reason why I must get down town. Fresh linen, my love." "Where do you live?" He gave the Utopian Club address. He didn't like women to track him home; unless it were Easter or Mona. What were those two girls doing now? And why did he dream of Mona Milton, Mona of all girls, instead of Easter—or Dora? Dreams are silly, meaningless, and you can't rationalize them. He

started to go, when Dora significantly said: "Don't forget the mantelpiece." For the second time that afternoon he was puzzled. "The mantelpiece," he echoed and searched for one with his eyes. Dora was not embarrassed. "The rent, angel-child, must be punctually paid on the first of the month. Our landlord is a terror. This apartment house is filled with well-kept ladies. No questions are asked. The elevator runs all night. We don't bother with the police. So, my sweet laddy-buck, plank down the mazuma, or must I make a noise like a dollar-mark for this stupid young chap from Paris?" He understood. He opened his wallet and gave her a handful of notes; thereat she ecstatically screamed and hugged him. He escaped.

XIV

Ulick was fond of Dora. No mistake as to the order of his sentiment. She was the average lust-cat of commerce; yet she was "different." Yes, he quoted Stendhal to her, and after he had related a certain anecdote of Stendhal's life in Milan, she put fingers in her ears; "Don't tell me another thing about the dirty old man, or I'll hate you." "Dirty old man" was a critical pronouncement that wouldn't please Stendhalians. Nevertheless it somehow suits Henri Beyle, who, genius that he was, must have been precisely what Dora called him. Well, most men are that; they don't have to be

old, either. What is life? A dirty business. Birth is repulsive, death horrible. You can't escape either, though you can cheat the worms by cremation—that foretaste of the lower regions. They went out to dinner. Ulick had hoped to see again the dark girl with the soft strange eyes. How often he had tried to analyze that expression to be found only in the eyes of a negress. A touch of melancholy, a hint of fear, a sweet submissivenes, and the naïveté of a child—these, with the heavy, slumberous lids, the full cup of the eyeball and the unconcealed languorous passion, pleased the æsthetic sense of the young man. Alas! she was not in sight. She had been released for the evening. Dora knew her business. The young man was entirely too susceptible; besides, she didn't like a "coon" servant, as she called her, butting-in. The girl's fate was assured.

They dined in the city, then visited a music-hall. He was mildly amused though sleepy and he made up his mind not to spend that night under Dora's roof. He went out during the entr'acte for a puff of fresh air and was annoyed on his return to find Paul Godard planted in the box beside Dora and calmly twisting the rings on her left hand. The men bowed: Ulick distantly. But good-tempered, irrepressible Paul exclaimed: "I say, Invern, we do coincide in our tastes, don't we?" Ulick nodded, not in the gayest spirit.

Dora divined his irritation and was flattered. He is jealous of me, she thought, and plucked at his sleeve. "Old cross-patch, sit nearer. Mr. Godard won't mind." (The hell he won't! muttered Ulick.) "You won't mind, Paul, will you? Ulick is such a bear—no, I mean a dear. Ulick," she shook his listless arm, "Ulick, you ought to have heard Paul sing your praises just before you came back. He said you were the only critic whose criticisms he read. Now, be good—old crank!" The atmosphere became frigid. Paul felt it, and he was not exactly thin-skinned. He kissed Dora's hand, whispered, and inclining his head in Ulick's direction, went away. Silent, Ulick accompanied Dora to her apartment and excused himself. To his slight surprise she accepted his excuse, and pleaded sleepiness herself; to his jealously acute perception there was an absence of heartiness in their final embrace, but perhaps that was because the chauffeur was watching them. She named a day and he promised. As he left the taxi at the club the man confidentially whispered: "Some girl, that?"

Ulick wasn't annoyed. Why should he be? Dora belonged to the public. She came from the people. Her daintiness was superficial. A pretty vulgarian, her appeal was universal to males in rut. The wealthy Paul and the humble mechanician both longed for her. So had Ulick, and he would again. She was aware of her attractions and like the busy little mer-

chant she was she sold her wares to the highest bidder. But a demure harlot in demeanour occasionally refined. Silver plate that showed prosaic brass when she was angry or offguard; then her language darkened the air; profanity, abuse, obscenity. The filthiest words in the mud-lark vocabulary hurtled by the heads of her antagonists, whether a sister-cocotte, a chauffeur, or a clubman. Ulick was yet to pass through that verbal ordeal; but it would surely come to him as it did to the rest. She drank too much, and that was her vice. Her profession was in her estimation as honourable as any other. What's the difference between me and the poor dirty wife with a dozen brats? A woman is always kept by a man, wedding-ring or no. Don't I love babies? I dote on them. Thus her philosophy and her preference. She adored children. She loved all the nice young chaps who made her presents and helped to pay her steadily mounting household expenses. If she could only put aside a few dollars every week for the rainy day sure to come. But she never could. The weekly bills were so numerous and so tame, that they ate out of her hands, she would joke. And Paul Godard would surely sleep under her roof this very night, said Ulick, as he wearily undressed himself. I shan't worry much. Dora is a commodity. So is Paul. So am I—for Dora. So is Mona. We are all chattels of chance.

XV

For more than a week Ulick hadn't seen Mona. He hadn't much missed her in the swelter of the new passion, but after ten days passed he began to worry. What if she were sick? Or angry? And that was an unpleasant contingency. The worst of it was that he had no way of knowing the truth. Milt was at the seminary and seldom wrote. Ulick didn't know Mona's parents, not even by sight. Should he risk a call? No, anything but calling. She would be angry with him for breaking her most rigid rule. For some unearthly reason she had made him promise not to visit her, not to seek to know her father and mother; above all, not to divulge the fact of their friendship to her brother. That would be the one unforgivable sin. Ulick had promised, though reluctantly. Why this mystery! He was not married. He was not a criminal; far from it, he was considered a very good catch, not only because of his family connections and youth, but his income was a bait for ambitious mothers with unmarried daughters. He knew all this, so he was surprised at the little shifts and tactics of Mona. She is romantic. She is over-sexed—he summoned to his memory her deep-set, passionate eyes; and she likes to make herself not too easy, he decided; but what in the devil has become of her?

He went to their old trysting place in the park. He went—with Dora—to the Casino and pumped M. Dorval. No, that amiable man hadn't seen either Mlle. Milton or her student-brother. Suppose she came in now and found me sitting here with Dora. I shouldn't be frightened. She is too sensible not to know the nature of the animal man. But Milt might cut me and put an end to our friendship. I'll wager Mona would continue to meet me. He saw Alfred Stone one afternoon and heard from this indefatigable gossip and news-gatherer that Mrs. Milton and Mona had gone to Hot Springs for a month. He had been to see them (he calls, I can't, ruminated Ulick) and found Mrs. Milton not at all well. Nor was Mona in the best of health. She was snappy and said she needed a change. A change was good for everyone, and, continued Alfred, she gave me such a disagreeable look that I beat a retreat. Say, Ulick, what are you up to with that young woman? She's not the Dora kind, you know, not even the Easter kind, and she is Milt's sister. Ulick was aghast. This busybody telling him of his moral remissness, of his intimacy with Mona. How did he find that out? And Dora. And Easter. It was too much for his irritable nerves.

"Mind your own business, Al, and I'll attend to mine." He turned and walked in another direction. He fumed with anger. Dora, too! But Stone was a visitor to every theatre and concert-hall in town.

Alfred must have seen Dora with him. What did it matter, anyhow? Dora is all right. A hired woman, nothing more. But it was infernal impudence on Alfred's part to drag in Mona's name, and so suddenly. What could he know in reality? Very little. But he knew. That was the worst of it; and there was the implication of a threat in the use of Milt's name. A warning? That sink of all the iniquities, Alfred Stone, to preach to him. He deserved a kicking. He was too contemptible to punch. Ulick felt his biceps harden. And for heaven's sake why did he bring in the name of Easter? He was certain that Alfred had been jealous from the start about the way Easter deserted him for Ulick. His amour-propre was scratched. He had known her first. He had taken her to the Conservatoire, to Madame Ash, and if he missed introducing her to Lilli Lehmann, had he not urged upon that great artiste the advisability of developing the young singer? And there were the chances to make the connection a profitable one for Alfred. He never forgets self, bitterly said Ulick. He is a rotten little egotist and I wouldn't put him above chantage, polite chantage, if you will, but plain extortion at the end. Parasite, pimp, gambler. He recited a litany of abusive names. If Alfred had a hint of that New Hampshire affair, God help Easter! He would dog her like a detective. The hound. In that case the only resort for me would be to give him a horsewhipping. Would that keep his vile tongue

in his mouth? I doubt it. But I'll take his advice. I'll go slow. Why hasn't Mona written me?

XVI

That idea haunted him. Why, at least, hadn't she dropped him a line saying she was going away? Had the miserable spy, Alfred, given her a hint of Dora? He had spoken of the "orgy"—that's what the newspapers called it—at the studio. It made the fortune of the pie-girl, and the list of guests' names had been scrupulously printed, Ulick Invern's among the rest. It gave him vogue at the clubs, did that wretched bacchanale, and at the opera or theatre he saw women curiously regard him. Pulpits had expounded upon the Scarlet Woman sitting on the Seven Hills of Babylon; meaning both Rome and New York. Why, then, shouldn't Mona have heard, perhaps read, of his complicity in the horrid debauch? Not that it was so horrid to him. More stupid, in fact, than horrid. Nevertheless, she might have written him a sweet scolding letter. No, it wasn't Ned Haldane's abridged version of a Thousand and One Nights that had angered her; it was Dora; Dora and nothing else. He shrugged his shoulders over this solution and went at once to see that bewitching young person. There, the nymph making her orisons, sitting on his lap, he became moody, absent-minded, and surly, so much so that the girl ex-

claimed: "Ulick Invern, what's the woman's name?" He didn't answer. He was glad she hadn't called him Jewel. Only Mona called him Jewel. Mona and Easter. He softly swore that Dora must never use his pet name, and in that resolution the character of Ulick flew like a flag. He was indeed a multiple personality.

XVII

The Arena was cosy and inviting when, on a night during Easter week, Ulick entered and traversed the length of the room. All the tables were occupied. Mr. Muschenheim met him and for a few minutes they gossiped in German, which language Ulick spoke as well as he did French and English because of his sojourn at Jena. "Your friends are sitting in the next room, in the corner," said his host. Ulick cast inquiring eyes. To his surprise he saw Milt and with him, Alfred. Considering how heartily he had cursed him after their last encounter Ulick's power of social adaptation must have been in excellent working order. He went over to the pair and was welcomed by Milt with unfeigned cordiality. Alfred gave him two chilly fingers. "You here?" Ulick asked. "Yes," replied Milt. "I am home for a week, the Easter holidays, you know." "And he isn't ashamed to sit in a café with his collar buttoned behind," Stone jeered. "Now, Alfred, what nonsense. On the continent even the clergy go to public places,

such as concerts, opera, and restaurants. We must eat and drink like other men. Look at Mgr. Ducey. He is a man of the world, yet an irreproachable ecclesiastic." Alfred smiled. Ulick didn't dare to ask news of Mona. His heart was heavy with anticipation. The sight of her brother revived his love. What a charming girl she was. What intelligence. How unlike other women? With her the expected never happened. He was annoyed at his false position, and not reassured when his eyes met the searching glance of Milt.

"Well, Ulick, how goes the culture of that famous ego of yours?" The tone was friendly, but for some reason, inexplicable to himself, Ulick felt annoyed. "My ego is all right, Milt. Anyhow, it is freer than yours. Convictions are prisons, you know?" "Ah, Nietzsche. I see you have absorbed his poison, too. My dear boy, those false prophets and corrupters of youth always preach freedom. Freedom for what? While I am not a determinist, yet I admit we can't be free from ourselves. Our personality is an ensemble of our ancestral characteristics. Our instincts are dangerous guides. Just now there is a tendency to place instinct over intellect. Reason unaided by God is a treacherous guide, but instinct alone! Heavens. In twenty years cosmos would be chaos." Milt wiped his forehead.

"Phew!" cried Alfred, "what a sermon you will preach some day, Milt. You will be a regular turkey-cock of God. Instinct or not, our country is galloping

hellward. Watch. When it was half aristocratic there was some outward semblance of respect for the government, but today the individual, and his rights, are both growing less and less. Mob rules. The melting-pot! What rot! We shall never melt the muckers who are overrunning us. I happen to have a good friend, an abbé from Luxembourg, little plump, blond; the typical French abbé of the eighteenth century. He has a theory. He says: 'The first swarm of locusts ate up the Indians; then came the Irish; and the English and Dutch disappeared. Followed the Germans, and now the Italians and Slavs. They have eaten up the native American. The Jews are the last and deadliest locusts of all; when they finish with America not a green leaf, a blade of grass, an ear of wheat, will be left in the land.'" The others were amused at his earnestness. Surely Alfred was of Jewish descent! Ulick interposed: "But, Alfred, you are a Jew. Why do you class them among the destructive elements? As for the Italians—well, I wish that America had been completely colonized by them. What a different atmosphere would be ours. The fine-arts, and the art of living, would be our heritage instead of our craze for commercialism, not to mention the growing menace of puritanism." "Don't abuse the Puritans," interrupted Milt. "They are a misrepresented people. It is their fanatical offspring who will lay waste America. A moribund branch of

Christianity will attempt to shackle freedom and force its prejudices on a free people . . ."

"Free fiddlesticks"! Alfred was in a rage. "Melting-pot be hanged. There will be anarchy in this land if these rattlesnakes are not scotched—you can't kill them. A republic is doomed to tyranny; the worst sort of tyranny—public opinion. I grant you, Milt, that the modern breed of those Mayflower pests are more tyrannical than the original lot of religious degenerates —what else were they, crazy as lunatics with their private interpretations of biblical texts; the book of the Apocalypse is responsible for more madmen than any other so-called sacred script in existence—yet the neo-puritan means to put us all in a little hell of his own. He calls it heaven, but it will be hell. The country is overrun by astrologists, fortune-tellers, unchristian scientists, holy howlers. We are not far from being a nation of mad folk. One neurosis follows another. I tell you—anarchy looms ahead. And woman-suffrage —the worst of all our tyrants; woman, the external ninny. She is to rule, as if she doesn't play her sex now for all it's worth. Pardon me, Milt—she is right as a cook or a concubine, but as a ruler! Excuse me. And prohibition. It's coming, and in its train, drugs and other tyrannies. Men will smoke bad tobacco in fear and trembling. The melting-pot—I see the locusts swarming for their last attack on the good things of America. Poor old America! She succumbed because

she was too sentimental, and sentimentality breeds altruism, and altruism breeds busybodies, and busybodies breed war. War breeds more war, and then the final catastrophe . . ."

"Stop it!" commanded Milt, "stop that choral of pessimism. So bad things are not." "Didn't Nietzsche assert that Christianity and alcohol have been the two great means of corruption and still are the worst foes of civilization?" asked Ulick. "Why drag in alcohol?" "If he did, he was quite right," commented Alfred, as he emptied his stein and rapped for another. "Symptoms of mysticism are usually accompanied by sexual impotence." Milt was distressed. The turn of the talk didn't please him, besides, it was Ulick, not Alfred, in whom he was interested. The other, that little Jew atheist with his filthy vices—all the turpitudes, he felt assured—was a rotten branch lopped from his own religion and race. Christianity wanted none of such men; desiccated souls. Vases of iniquity. Vile accursed, doomed to Gehenna. Nevertheless, with his paternal solicitude for the straying sinner, Milt placed his hand over Alfred's and smiled benignly. "Alfred," he adjured, "Alfred, repent while there's time. Here is Ulick fuddling his wits with writings that are of no pith or moment. Their rhetoric it is that seduces him. The petticoats, too,—Hello! who's this? I vow if here isn't Paul Godard." Ulick groaned. Always Paul. He couldn't escape him. Nor did Alfred look overjoyed.

Paul, accompanied by an insignificant chap, bustled to the table. "Oh! I say, isn't this a jolly go. You fellows look as if you had the affairs of state burdening your soul. You have? Well, it's time I intervened and brought a new atmosphere to cheer you up. How do, bishop? No, not yet? But soon will be, I hope, Milt. Some day, some day! as Tosti sings. How d'ye do, Ulick? When did you see Dodo last? Fascinating creature. I drink her health. And how are you, Stone? Your bones as sour as ever. Ah! yes, I forgot! This is my friend Bell. But, of course, you know him. He is working the same side of the street as you fellows—excepting the Rev. Milt. What is it you say, Invern? Once a newspaper man always a whore? Isn't that it? A jolly epigram, that . . ." He rattled on. "What I really said was this," tartly answered Ulick: "Once a millionaire always an imbecile." Paul laughed the loudest. "The tables turned, that deal, and speaking of table-turning, let's get the head-waiter to fetch a larger table. I need elbow room, for I feel that I'm going to make a night of it." "What night isn't all night with you?" demanded Ulick. Paul sweetly grinned. "The night you are there," and jerked his hand in the direction of Lexington Avenue. Invern scowled, but kept his temper.

They now sat in the middle of the room around a bigger table. Bell, who had been blinking at the com-

pany, blurted out: "Paul, I saw a divorced wife of mine today." "Which one"? asked Paul, winking at Stone. "I think it was the one who plays the violoncello—or should I say, 'cello, Stone? Thank you. Yes, it was Ida. She set me crazy with her practising. That bull-fiddle always between her knees—she complained of corns on her knees—always rumbling or buzzing like a big bumble-bee with a basso-profundo stinger. No, I simply couldn't stand it. I gave her grounds for divorce, miles and miles of grounds"— "Don't boast, Bell," admonished Paul— "I don't boast, Godard. Whatever fruit fails we men all know that the co-respondent crop never fails. I might add, never frosts." And then he went off into an hysterical burst of laughter. No one smiled. Undaunted, Bell dried his eyes and resumed: "Ida is O. K. She married a house-painter. I don't think any the less of her for that. House-painters make more money than journalists—I beg pardon, Stone—I mean, newspaper men. That constipated gargoyle, Snapgood, he hates the word. He calls himself a journalist. I'm a newspaper man, I am . . ." "And as ignorant as one, too," sarcastically added Alfred. A chorus of dissent followed. Because Bell was a born ass, the tribe he belonged to was not, necessarily, the same. "You should go to London, Alfred. There it takes four newspaper men combined to understand a Yankee joke." It was Milt who spoke. 'I don't wonder," retorted Alfred.

Bell was a much-married, much-harried, much-divorced man. Some wags said that he was more divorced than married, more sinning than sinned against. He admitted that he had to pay common-law alimony, as he called it, to his common-law wives. They were legion. This small, stupid-looking chap had a passion for getting into scrapes with girls. He had been divorced four times in four different states by duped women, whose indignation was boundless when they failed to get alimony; rather, failed to collect. Their man was quicksilver. He always escaped. Twice, death had obligingly stepped in and divorced him. In these cases he even escaped paying posthumous alimony; he wouldn't foot the undertaker's bill. His motto was: "Let the dead bury the dead." And so it came to pass, he had married in succession his landlady's daughter, a greasy frump, a widow with an annuity, a pianiste, a 'cellist. Bell was also musical. He had successively lived with a fat chorus girl, a professional prostitute—he kept this particular episode to himself, a circus-rider, a servant girl, an octoroon, and with two sisters, who worked in an artificial flower-shop. He was versatile, Bell. As he was glib of pen and tongue he earned plenty of money and the women flocked about him. He had a certain goatish reputation. Girls giggled when he passed, his eyes lecherously ogling. Little riders! they whispered, and giggled again. Ulick despised him, but his own morals were hardly a whit

better; only his tastes were more discriminating; thus he consoled himself.

XVIII

Without a transposition the conversation glided to the theme of women. Bell, who was beginning to feel his liquor, intoned a toast which he swore he had heard at a dentists' banquet, but a nudge under the table from Alfred kept him from further rambling. Milt wasn't annoyed. He calmly sipped his beer, his hearing keen for fluctuations in the moral market. He had said that a priest must know the human soul inside and out. To be in the world, yet not of it, to wade through the sins and heresies of this ignominious age, yet never wallow in them. To stand in front of the monkey-cage we call life, watch the antics of the inmates but never imperil his soul by approving of the sarabande of sex surrounding him. That was the ideal of Milt. He had the makings in him of a lover, a thinker, a rebel. But never did he lapse into that stupration of the soul, that mass of confused emotion evoked by the curves of the female form he never indulged in. The brief, dizzy syncope which ensues during the frantic bundling of the two sexes he had never experienced, though he yearned for it, during moments of weakness. But he was a level-headed young man. He knew the straight way, and also the path of flaming

ecstasy. He meant to work long and faithfully in the vineyard of the Lord, and to accomplish his self-imposed mission he prepared by studying life from all angles, dubious or beautiful. His heart was a reservoir overflowing with love for his fellow-men. He cherished profound affection for his sister, also profound distrust. Her many excellent, even superlative, qualities were offset by a perverse twist, not congenital. It might prove her undoing. He fervently prayed for her conversion, and by some odd association of ideas he prayed for the salvation of Ulick Invern's soul; that he, with his splendid heritage of faith, family, fortune, talent, be given the boon of light. Ulick and Mona made a pleasant picture in the mind of this candidate for the order of Melchizedek.

"Say, Milt," speculated Stone in his most aggressively malicious manner, "whenever I look at a fresh-coloured young priest like you, I don't wonder that the girls swarm about you like flies in a molasses cask. Your purity is written in your eyes. It oozes from your expression. It's an aura. The female ever in pursuit of masculine honey feels this, and you are her idol, as is, in a different fashion, a tenor." Milt protested. Paul suddenly lost his head, crying: "Woman is the split-infinitive in the grammar of life," which was capped by Bell: "Woman is an ecstasy-breeding machine." "I hate speeches beginning with—Woman is this, woman is that," proclaimed Ulick. "When men

foregather and booze they suddenly land in that bohemia of dead-sea fruit, the woman question. Women are human like men, and the little difference"—"Bless de Lawd fer de difference, as the darky preacher said—" It was the thick voice of Bell—"is the cause for the lot of rotten talk and theorizing." "Bravo, Ulick!" said Milt, with sentimental vehemence. "Faire remonter tout son sexe dans son cerveau," he added. But Stone was curious. "I'd like to know the trick of that sex-transposition. Women are a nuisance—sometimes; often I should like to do without them; but I acknowledge I can't. What's the method, Milt, camphor or prayer?" Milt, scandalized, didn't reply. To break the embarrassing silence Ulick turned to Paul and asked him if he knew anything new.

"Oh, yes, Marie, the singing comedienne, has just had a row with her last husband. You know that fastidious baronet of hers who wears a bangle on his ankle. The other night at Lady Murchison's dinner I sat next to her. I wished to be friendly, so I asked how she was getting along with her young man. "Oh, nicely," she said, with that dazzling Celtic smile, "we never quarrel unless we fall in love with the same man." A roar followed. Milt groaned.

"Only the women a man doesn't win are desirable." "Listen to the Rochefoucauld! Bell, where do you get your novel ideas?" "Such ideas should be caged like monkeys"—this from Milt. Then he arose, disgusted.

"You chaps are rubbing it in. One would suppose that sex ruled this planet, instead of being, perhaps, only a necessary incident, or by-product. I'll move homewards. Will you be seen tomorrow afternoon, Ulick?" He knows something, thought Ulick, but he cordially invited Milt, assuring him that he would be found any time after the midday breakfast. Couldn't Milt take that meal with him? Milt consented. "Then sit down a moment, Milt, I should like to tell you of a theory advanced by Remy de Gourmont concerning sex. You spoke of a 'necessary incident.'" Milt sat down. "It's this," resumed Ulick. "De Gourmont insisted that the real protagonist of humanity, indeed, of all organic life, is to be found in the procreative process, which act epitomizes all creation. This theory may not be found in his remarkable Physique de l'Amour, it was something he thought out later. Briefly, we are not the rulers of our personal destiny, but only an envelope of flesh and blood to protect the chief factor of our being, our sex-organs. As long as they are vital our organism flourishes; when they weaken, men and women weaken with them, wither and die. It has a sinister ring, hasn't it, this idea of a hidden force directing our energies, our very fate. It is supported by the seers who through the ages have recognized a blind, remorseless power in whose grip our individual happiness is as helpless as a straw in a hurricane. Only the

species counts. Love is always tragic, even the amours of a ragpicker and a gutter-wench. Fatality is stamped on the forehead of every human. Little wonder primitive nations in the dusky depths of Asiatic mystic groves have prostrated themselves before the carved images of the lingam and yoni, the male and female principles. Sex is in the background of every modern religion, from the phallic symbol of the churchspire to the worshipping of the matrix." "I'm off," cried Milt, as he jumped up. "I can't stay here any longer in such a fetid atmosphere to have religion bespattered. Good-night, boys. Ulick—I'll be with you at the Maison Felicé at one o'clock, or thereabouts." He disappeared.

"I say, Ulick," remarked Paul, "you do draw the longbow, don't you, about sex-worship? Did you yarn for Milt's benefit or is it all gospel truth?" "It is in the gospels that you will find it," answered Ulick, who was distrait and feeling anxious over that projected visit. What did it presage! Stone nudged Bell, who was in his cups and snoring.

"Give us a rest with your sex-symbolism. I heard a good story this afternoon—wake up, Bell, this will fit your case some day—from Dr. Williams. He's my doctor. The best ever. Hasn't sent me a bill for years because the last one we shook dice for and I won. He has a patient, an old chap of sixty who came to him one day and begged, on his knees, the Doc said, for

once more, only once! His doctor bluntly told him a man isn't like a woman—toujours prête—but given by nature a certain number of cartridges which he is to use as suits his temperament. If he fires them off in his youth, in middle-age he will be empty-handed and must avoid targets and rifle-ranges. The wise space their shooting and we sometimes, not often, witness the spectacle of an old man, hale and hearty, buying a buxom young target and actually scoring bull's-eyes. This, however, is an exceptional occurrence. The offspring of aged men are not taken seriously, as is evidenced by the brutal query: 'Who is the other fellow?' Horns seldom decorate the brows of youthful males. To make a short story long the doctor gave the poor old top a dose of some devilish compound, a Brown-Séquard cocktail containing picrid acid with mountain oysters, or lamb-fries, as a chaser. He was curious enough to ask his patient where he would fire off his last cartridge. The chap became voluble. He had an old wife whom he loved very much, but he kept all physical manifestations for his mistress, a younger woman, who supported her husband and a large family in the sweat of her deceit. A conscientious hard-working woman, who never deceived her lover, except with the aid of her legitimate husband—an arrangement understood, I believe. But the funny thing was that the old fellow became jealous of this same husband. He had boasted so much of the conflicts he had

waged when young that he greatly desired to give the lady of his affections a touch of his early quality. With the potent fluid of the doctor's drug sizzling in him he literally, so the Doc averred to me, scampered off helter-skelter to his beloved. Not his wife, mind you. Oh, no! That would be wasting powder and shot on a fortress already captured. He had telephoned the faithful concubine, who awaited him, her curiosity aroused. She felt certain that he would again make his usual fiasco. As the rejuvenated old goat bounded over the sidewalk, his blood tingling with the passion of youth and Damiana Mormon Elder's Wafers, a pretty puss of eighteen touched his elbow. She was an impudent mutt, but provocative. She winked and whispered:

"Hello, Pop! Come along and I'll give you the time of your life!" and by God he went with her, and that patient Griselda waiting for him in his second home, not to mention the wife of his bosom, at home (where she played a stiff Bridge every afternoon and never bothered her head about her foolish matrimonial partner). Yes, he went to the new rifle-range and heaven knows what lie he invented for the benefit of his mistress. The affair only proves that any woman who can give to an old man the illusion of virility, he will not only marry, but he will wear her on his heart of hearts; become her slave, in fact. Sex dies hard in us,

and despite popular belief, it is the last of the passions, pushing out avarice and gluttony, which pair of entertaining passions are supposed to illuminate the dusty lonesome years of a man's existence. Goethe married his cook, a stout country wench who drank herself into her grave in the august presence of her husband-poet. And all those old women titled and otherwise who marry coachmen, gardeners and grooms, husky young fellows—do they do this for intellectual companionship? The darky woman who said when asked as to her sex emotions: 'I'se only eighty. You've got to ask some lady older than me,' illustrates that sex fights as long as it can. The original Adam in us. That De Gourmont theory, Ulick, is a horrible idea; sex is hideous if you study it. Let the boys and girls keep their illusions and don't let them believe old Schopenhauer and his instinct of the species dictating their destiny"—"For the sake of sanity, Alfred, shut your trap and let's go home. Wake up, Bell. There's a fresh wife waiting you," said Ulick, glad to get away. "Which wife?" sleepily inquired Bell. "It seems as if a crowd of men can't end the evening without talking sex," grumbled Ulick. "I'm sick of sex." "So are we all," Stone assented, "because sex is a sickly thing. It's not health and conservation, but destruction, disease, death." Ulick fairly ran from him when they reached the street. Sex and damnation! he said between his teeth.

The first news of Easter came over the cables. She made her début at a concert in Berlin under the powerful wing of Lilli Lehmann and achieved a remarkable success. Her brilliant beauty was a factor, but it was her voice, luscious as an August sunset, and her emotional temperament that caused the furore. (A press-agent's fiction. There are no "furores" in concert-rooms, or at the opera. A lot of noise-loving imbeciles stamp their feet and shout. The claque is always busy. Hysterical criticism does the rest.) Certain exalted personages in the royal-box condescended to express their approval of Fraülein Esther Brandès, who was at once offered huge sums to sign a contract for future European appearances. (These offers are always announced in cablegrams.) Easter must have been ubiquitous, for in the foreign dispatches next day was a sensational account of a duel she fought with Mary Garden in the Bois at Paris with Johnstone Bennett—dear old sporting "Johnny"—as referee. Sybil Sanderson and Augusta Holmès sat in a balcony and compared scandals. Mary, lithe, elastic, and younger than Easter, pinked her antagonist. The duellists clasped hands and the party, chiefly composed of Parisian newspaper men, adjourned to Pré au Catalan, there to drink fresh milk and stale gossip. Rumour had it that the two girls were in love with the same man, no less than the fascinating barytone at the Opera, Maurice Renaud.

When Allie Wentworth, who was Easter's second, read this in "Le Soir" she burst into laughter and showed the story to "Johnny," who only lighted a fresh cigarette repeating the classic, "cinq lettres, le mot de Cambronne."

* * *

THE FIFTH GATE

At the fifth gate, the warder stripped her; he took off the girdle that encompasses her waist . . .

I

Alfred Stone as he stood on the boardwalk opposite the Marlborough-Blenheim asked himself why some bold thinker had not elucidated the psychology of Atlantic City. It has no moral landscape, he told himself, though it boasts the finest of seascapes. If there had been invented, as there will be some day, a psychic cinematograph, then, perhaps, a complete picture might be presented of this vulgar and fascinating resort —for vulgar in the sense of popularity it unquestionably is; monumentally vulgar, epically vulgar—epical, that is the precise word. There is a sweep of colour, a breeziness of space, a riot of sound and a chaos of movement that appal because of their amplitude. All creation seems out-of-doors. You jostle elbows with the man from Hindustan, the man from Newark, the man from London, and the man from California. Black, white, red, yellow, brown and nondescript races mingle on the boardwalk in that never-ending promenade from the Inlet to Chelsea. Between the Pickle and the Million Dollar Piers the course of humanity takes its way. In that section it is thickest. At every other step you use the short-arm jolt. In ten minutes you long for

the comparative ease of the rush-hour at Brooklyn Bridge.

Atlantic City is a queer Cosmopolis, and a Cosmopolis that could easily perish in a giant inundation so closely does it hug the rim of the sea. It is ugly, with the attractive ugliness of modern life. It is also many other things. Not Ostend, Dieppe, Brighton in England, Trouville, Scheveningen, Boulogne, nor yet Etretat, Naples, nor the Riviera rival the infinite variety of Atlantic City. It is not a retreat for those introspectively inclined. It is all on the surface; it is hard, glittering, unspeakably cacophonous, and it never sleeps. If you long to loaf and invite your nerves, Cape May is preferable.

The medley of life, the roaring of megaphones, the frantic rush and gabble of a babel-like chorus, the dazzling single line of booths, divans, stores, holes-in-the-wall hotels, cafés, carrousels, soda-fountains, side-shows, the buzzing of children, the shouting newsboys, the appeals of fakirs, the swift glances of eyes feminine, the scowl of beach-hawks and the innocent mien of bucolics—a Walt Whitman catalogue would not exhaust this metropolis of the sea, this paradise of "powerful uneducated persons," patricians, billionaires and shabby folk. And the piers—a second city on steel and wooden stilts, extending a half mile across the water, containing a hundred diversions. These piers recall the evolution from the lake-dwellers of Central Europe,

whose lacustrine deposits we marvel over, just as huge structures reared skyward, modern hotels, are the highly developed habitat of the cliff-dwellers. Doubtless thousands of years hence ardent archæologists will rummage into the deposits of ancient Atlantic City and weave a philosophic system from the strange shapes discovered; combs, coprolites, corsets, hairpins, shovels, flasks, and other "kitchen midden" of the present time.

If the Coleridge of Kubla Khan, or the Poe of the Domain of Arnheim could see the fantastic structures on the beach, those poets would sigh with satisfaction. In our chilly æsthetic air, ruminated Alfred, where utility leads beauty by the nose, the spectacle of an architect giving reign to his fancy and conceiving such an exotic pile as the hyphenated-hotel is a refreshing one. The author of Vathek, William Beckford, could have wished for nothing richer. This architecture might be Byzantine. It suggests St. Marco at Venice, St. Sophia at Constantinople, also a Hindoo palace, with its crouching dome, operatic façade, and its dominating monoliths with the blunt tops of concrete; the exterior decoration is a luxurious exfoliation in hues; turquoise and fawn. It is a dream-architecture, this, with its evocations of Asiatic colour and music.

But Atlantic City at night. Alfred recalled it as a picture for such different painters as Whistler or Toulouse-Lantrec. A sight not to be duplicated. Miles

of electric lamps up the boardwalk. Even the darker spaces above the Pickle-Pier are festooned with lace-like fire. It is a carnival of flame. You may start from the Inlet with an open book, walk for miles, perusing it all the while, until you reach the lower end of the promenade and touch the last wooden rail. The enormous amount of electricity consumed seems to make the air vital. Through those garlands of light moves a mob of well-behaved humans. The women are more mysterious than during the daytime. If you are still youthful you encounter magnetic glances. Dazzling glances. Sumptuous evening toilettes assault your nerves. Wealth envelops you. Apparently there is no poverty, no sickness, no unhappiness in existence. The optimistic exuberance of the American is seen here at its most depressing. Mark Tapley run to seed. There is a suggestion of the overblown, of the snobbish, in this al-fresco display; yet if you are not seeking the fly in the ointment you may enjoy it as you would enjoy the gorgeous tableaux of Aïda or Salammbô. It is all as unreal. How vulgar, how damnably vulgar! exclaimed Alfred, and he remembered the women he had seen at his hotel, their fingers hooped with opals, emeralds, sapphires, and diamonds, and holding green corn on the cob to their sensual lips. A dozen mouths simultaneously opened, pink and pearly traps; there was a snapping of dentals, a gnashing of corn. The diamonds flashed, the emeralds blazed with murky

green fire, and the sinister opalescence of the unlucky stone matched the colour of the succulent slaughtered vegetable. Surely no other vegetable but corn could enjoy such a scintillating death at the teeth of those pretty, overdressed matrons and silly maids. Alfred shuddered at the memory. Then he saw something that give him a start and caused him to whistle, interrogatively.

Coming toward him was Mona Milton, keeping in tow a blond youth in flannels. Evidently she had spied Alfred first. She made a friendly signal, then turning on her escort, she spoke words that acted as would a magical formula for disappearance. He faded into the crowd and Mona was soon shaking hands with the critic.

"You! What good wind blew you down here?" "You, of course, how can you ask?" He spoke in his accustomed cynical strain. She passed it over. Something distracted her. "Did you see Milt recently?" she asked, but she did not look him in the eye. She means Ulick, was Alfred's interior comment. "Why, yes," he briskly replied. "Yes, Milt was with us the other night at the Arena." "At the Arena?" she faintly echoed. There was a pause. He proposed that they should walk toward the Inlet. The air is fresher there. He told her that he had felt off his feed, hence his unexpected appearance and he politely inquired as to the state of her mother's health. "You see," she said, "Hot Springs

proved too enervating for mamma, and I proposed a spell of salt air. We shan't stay longer than a week or two. Poor papa—alone with his metaphysics and his eternal chess at the Century. I don't mean to say that he can't get along without us, vous autres, you men are always more self-centred than the women. You have your clubs, your games, and as a final resort your library. Still, papa must miss mamma. So home we go by the beginning of July—" "And to the most heated time in the season." "Oh, I don't much mind the heat. I read. I play a little. There is the park a block away and . . ." "And Ulick?" "Ulick? Mr. Invern? What in the world makes you drag in his name?" She was cool, unblushing, but her eyes glowed expressively.

"Come, come, Mona, you can't pull the wool over the eyes of this citizen. I know all about your promenades, your luncheons in darkest Martin's, your park rides and presumable holding hands in three languages. I will be frank with you. I don't approve of the intrigue." "Intrigue!" she cried, visibly moved. He noticed it and continued, rather elated: "Yes, that's what the affair is, Mona, understand me, I don't mean intrigue with vulgar connotations. That Master Ulick reserves for his mistress Dora Anonymous. I beg your pardon, Mona, I didn't mean to startle you." She had relinquished his arm, abruptly turned to the rail of the boardwalk and gazed seaward. Alfred was furious with himself. He knew that he shouldn't have so

awkwardly blurted out the facts of another man's private peccadilloes, but he couldn't help himself and now he had hurt the one woman in the world that he thoroughly respected. He meditated. Her back didn't invite conversation; worse still, she was humming. That he knew was a storm-warning. A schoolmate of Milt's, he had been a visitor in the family for a decade and more. He threw away his cigarette. Then he grasped Mona's left arm. She did not repulse him. She still hummed a tune, one that he recognized. Carmen's song of defiance. "Mona, I humbly apologize for my impudence. I didn't mean to give Ulick away, but I hate to see you throw yourself at his feet." She turned; he noted that while her eyes were wet—such lovely, appealing eyes—she was smiling. "You dear stupid old Alfred. With all your clairvoyance, can't you see that I don't care whether Mr. Invern has one or ten mistresses? I'm annoyed only because you venture to scold me because I dare go about with him. Pray, since when are you become the keeper of my conscience? You—of all men? I'll keep company with Ulick—with Mr. Invern as much as I please. Yes, and hold hands with him if I care to." She was amused. "I suppose you will tell Milt." He was confused and murmured: "I've told him already. Don't go away, Mona—he took it quite calmly, I assure you." But she was aroused. He had never seen this charming girl with the placid temper in a rage. She stamped her foot crying: "Go

away, go away from me at once, and please don't come to our house while Milt is away. I shall refuse to see you." Then she cut into one of the side streets and Alfred found himself in turn looking at the sea and watching with vague eyes the chugging motor-boats. He went over to Atlantic Avenue, to the "Extra-Dry Café" and drank whisky cocktails.

That same evening, undaunted, he called at the St. Charles and asked for Mrs. Milton. She received him with her accustomed undemonstrative cordiality; she possessed to an unusual degree the tact of omission. Mona on her return—long after the dinner-hour—hinted that Alfred and she had indulged in an absurd quarrel. But she did not divulge the cause. Alfred is always Alfred, she explained and went upstairs to change her walking attire for evening clothes. From the corner of her eye she saw him talking to her mother. She had her youthful cavalier of the afternoon at her side and, as if to show Alfred that there was more than one man on the globe besides Ulick, she flirted and gossiped to such effect that the young man lost his head and squeezed her hand, blushing as he did so. She did not move, for she saw that Alfred had witnessed the scene. He nodded in her direction, lifting ironical eyebrows. That decided her. She beckoned to him, much to the disgust of her infatuated companion. She again waved her magic wand of dismissal. He evaporated into thin air; he was hardly more sub-

stantial himself. "Come here, Alfred, if mamma will spare you. I have something to tell you." Her mother, pleased to see that the best friend of her beloved son was to be taken again into the good graces of her daughter, moved indoors, giving sleepiness as an excuse. "Don't you young people stay up too late. The salt air is very damp. Good night, Alfred. I hope to see you in the morning."

II

"Listen, Alfred. Sit down and listen. I don't wish you to think I'm such a ninny as to fancy a young man like Ulick is without his distractions. Only keep your Doras to yourself—" "Which Ulick can't accomplish. He shares her with Paul Godard," eagerly broke in Alfred. "No scandal, please," she remonstrated. "His private affairs—the private affairs of the mercurial Paul—I confess I like Paul, he is at least well-bred—do not concern me, but what does interest me is your honest opinion of Ulick Invern's character. As he is your closest friend you are bound in honour to give him a bad black eye for my special benefit. But I shall discount your abuse. So go ahead and get rid of your venom." He was hurt by the flippant manner of this invitation. He didn't mind the imputation, for he prided himself on his sharp tongue and epigrammatic slashing at other people's good names, but

like most cynics he feared critical guns trained on his own sensitive self. She laughed all the more. In a cold sullen irritation he spoke his little piece with Ulick as thesis.

"You greatly mistake me, Mona, if you think I underestimate the splendid qualities of Invern. He is a good friend, a friend in need. Generosity of spirit he abounds in. It is his strong point, also his weakest. He is too receptive. He may write well some day, yet I don't believe the man will go far. Again his procrastination, his receptivity, his money, will all militate against his achieving what he calls artistic success, what I call blithering nonsense. Why, if he had a genuine personality, I mean, of course, an artistic personality, he would not talk so much about evolving one—which he does about a dozen times daily. That's number one. Number two is his weakness concerning your sex." She lifted a deprecating hand. "I shan't bother you with any stories about the way he shoots off his young fireworks. That is only a liberation of his surplus energy. If he didn't pursue the Eternal Feminine, if he didn't go in quest of the elusive girl, he might be drinking or gambling—like myself. Mind you, I don't give him any credit for not indulging in the sports of the average male. He saw too much of dissipation when he was young. The old man drank himself to death, and would have gambled away his wife's fortune if it had not been tied up so securely by her father,

Bartlett the banker. No, I don't take any stock in Ulick's negative virtues. If he didn't hate the taste of alcohol and the smell of tobacco, he would be like the rest of us; perhaps worse. I only hope he won't take to booze when he is mature; no hope for him if he does. Late boozers never reform. My chief criticism, my dear Mona, is directed against his instability of character. Ulick is true to any wind that blows. He is an emotional weathercock. Any petticoat that crosses his vision attracts him and the last becomes the Eternal She who must be obeyed. I'm speaking for your good, Mona. Just remember his infatuation for Easter, and now—she is only a year gone and it's out of sight, out of mind with him."

Mona attentively listened. At the casual reference to Easter she asked: "What sort of a girl is this Easter —what's her real name?" "Esther Brandès. No, she isn't a Jewess, though I shouldn't be surprised to learn that her mysterious father—she seldom refers to his existence—was of the tribe. Danish, they say, a countryman of Georg Brandes. What sort? A very good sort, I assure you, altogether apart from her musical and dramatic gifts. Now, there's a woman who will go far, because she possesses what Ulick lacks; singleness of purpose. She only sees artistic success, and she goes straight for it. She will get there with both feet, as the saying is. Esther Brandès in ten years may be treading in the august footsteps of Lilli Lehmann. Who knows!

Why did she fight a duel with Mary Garden? you ask. Probably because she saw a chance to get into the cable news. Mary is canny. Esther is cannier. She would fight with Frida Ash if she thought it would bring forth a newspaper paragraph. She knows the ropes. Publicity. Notoriety. Anything scandalous, so that she is not forgotten. That's why I believe she will win out. Ulick—never. He hasn't the staying power. He won't take punishment. He is a dreamer and an egoist. He fondly believes that he is becoming a good American when he is only a deracinated cosmopolitan. His place is Paris, not New York. In the end he will be only a spoiled Parisian."

"He complains that everyone advises him to return to Paris," interjected Mona, who seemed sleepy. "And jolly good advice it is. I'm telling you nothing novel, Mona; your brother Milt has discoursed Ulick, his talents—he has more than one. Did you ever hear him play Chopin?—his personality; a chameleon, I tell you, a charming chameleon, intellectually inconstant, and always to be watched. I hope you haven't fallen too deeply in love with him not to pull out when you understand his real character—or want of it. He is quite capable of passing the night with two or three women if the mood is upon him, and physical circumstances favourable. Pardon me, Mona, if I speak plainly. I am concerned for your welfare, else"——She rose, rubbed her eyes, and held out her hand.

"That's the consecrated phrase, Alfred. The most interesting part of your highly moral discourse was your description of Easter. She intrigues my curiosity. Do you suppose that Ulick will tumble over when she returns?" Alfred was surly. "I dare say. But I'm not his keeper. Good night, and good-bye, Mona. I go up in the morning. May I run in on your return?" Mona nodded. "You may. Milt will be with us for his annual vacation, and you ought to sleep well tonight after demolishing two reputations." Alfred grunted a farewell.

III

Milt was punctual and the friends ate one of Madame Felicé's excellent luncheons in a receptive mood. The conversation ranged from food to metaphysics. "Ah, Ulick!" cried Milt, who was unusually expansive, "if you would only make up your mind as to your future." "But I have," asserted Ulick. "I have. I mean to become a good American citizen and write artistic books." "I doubt if you will ever become one or accomplish the other," was the unexpected criticism of this young theological student, who saw life steadily. "The foreign virus is in your blood, Ulick. You are one-half Frenchman, the other half cosmopolitan; both are fatal to true Americanism. You should have remained in Paris—" "Another!" groaned Ulick—"and married some nice girl, any nationality so she would be

nice, raise a family and settle down." "What a dear old philistine you are, Milt. Why don't you?" Milt slightly coloured. "Because I've chosen the better part like Mary in the gospel. The highest function permitted man is that of the priest. Many are called, few chosen. I tremble before the responsibility of my vocation. I can only pray in all humility that I shall not be an unworthy servant of the Lord." Ulick suddenly changed the subject by asking: "Milt, what is your first name? I've never heard you called anything but Milt, except when Alfred calls you Mel." Milt solemnly envisaged his questioner. "My first name is a secret. Alfred happens to know because we were at college for years in the same classes. It is a name sacred to me, my mother's idea, yet a name that I fear to use because it excites mirth." "Good heavens! what an awful name it must be. Melodeon or Molasses?" "I said sacred, Ulick. Let's drop the question." Milt was so grave that his companion shrugged in despair.

"Why do you think I'll never write artistic books?" he demanded. "It's not the artistic I'm fearing, it's the fact that unless you develop character your books will not even fill the belly with the east wind." "Precisely what Huysmans said. Without personality, no talent in a writer." "Your Huysmans left out morality in his schedule." "What's morality got to do with art?" "Only this," earnestly continued Milt, "it must be at least implicit in every book a man or woman writes,

else the book will rot. Don't forget—decayed souls stink. The books of your predilection are such that he who reads must run away, or imperil his soul's salvation. Vanitas! Ulick. I speak without picking amiable words. Yours is a case that demands radical treatment." "Wait a bit. I'm not religious. Your God is too remote for me. From the frosty altitude where he reigns he makes no sign of granting our prayers. Does he even love his grovelling earth-creatures?" Milt was not shocked at these impetuous questions. "Baruch Spinoza has said: That whoso loveth God truly, must not expect to be loved by God in return." "But Spinoza was a Jew and an atheist. Neither his synagogue nor the Christian Church would have aught of him." "True," answered Milt, "I only quoted him to prove my contention. Finite creatures must love their creator. The act of worship constitutes their salvation." Again Ulick groaned. "What has your religion to do with my projected books?" He was getting impatient at the airs of amateur omniscience assumed by the other. They went to Ulick's chamber.

Milt's eye roved over the books on a dozen shelves. "Ah! Here are your gods. Stendhal, Baudelaire, Flaubert, Anatole France, Huysmans, Maurice Barrès—how I loathe that metaphysical dandy!—Nietzsche, unfortunate madman, Ibsen, Max Stirner, William Blake, another lunatic—a nice gang of mind-poisoners. With exception of Huysmans they are corrupters of youth.

Listen to this—" and he opened on the last page of A Rebours. " 'Take pity, O Lord, on the Christian who doubts, on the sceptic who seeks to believe, on the convict of life, who embarks alone, in the night, beneath a sky no longer lit by the consoling beacons of ancient faith.' For me, that is the saddest sentence in all the music of your prose-men. Great artists? Yes. But guides to damnation. Moral anarchs, their teaching will lead to the anarchy of physical violence. Mark my words. All Europe will suffer sometime from their doctrines. As for your Barrès, while he is no longer the anarch of his Enemy of the Laws and is going in for nationalism nowadays, nevertheless his is a dilettante preciosity whose gift of assimilation is his prime quality. Also to be labelled 'dangerous,' though only for the intellectual. He possesses a barren imagination. I grant you he writes supple, harmonious prose, though he is a mere neophyte compared with those charming princes of corruption, Ernest Renan and Anatole France. All your modern heroes, whom you resemble, Ulick, I am sorry to say, derive from that abominable Julien Sorel in Stendhal's Red and Black. The admirable antidote to that criminal, free-man, individualist, is Robert Greslou in Paul Bourget's Disciple. Therein you may see where unbridled indulgence, whether in thought or act, will lead a young man. What are you writing just now, Ulick?" Milt took up some sheets from the desk.

"Oh, this is very bad. What next? 'Ideas and Images of Evil.' That's simply a Baudelairean title, and while that wonderful poet—yes, I won't deny that I have read him with more interest than the atheist Victor Hugo—recognized the existence of evil, of a personal devil, Satan or Lucifer, he didn't fall down and worship him." "How about the Litany of Satan?" interrupted Ulick. "It is to be read in a Manichean sense. It is objective." "And how about Carducci's Hymn to Satan? ('Inno a Satana')

"Salute, O Satana
O ribellione
O forza vindice
Della ragione."

"Simply Italianate Baudelaire," cried Milt, and in a rage he exclaimed: "You actually memorize such vile blasphemers. But I'm very sure you can't repeat the Lord's Prayer, the Confiteor or recite the Litany of our Blessed Virgin." Ulick stood in the middle of the room, his hands clasped, his eyes closed, and recited the prayer, the Confiteor and the Litany, adding in a low voice, "A pure heart pierceth heaven and hell." Milt was overjoyed. He shook Ulick's hand, crying: "You know Thomas à Kempis, too? Come, there is hope for your immortal soul. Oh, Ulick! Why don't you forswear your evil ways of living! Give over your in-

veterate concupiscence." Ulick answered by quoting: "Tandem ergo discubuimus pueris Alexandrinis . . ."

"Stop, Ulick! How dare you quote that vilest of pagans, Petronius Arbiter, almost in the same breath with the divine À Kempis?" For answer Ulick drew from his pocket a tiny book entitled "The Christian's Pattern, by Thomas à Kempis, edited by JohnWesley, A. M." bearing the date of 1832 and published in New York, by Charles Wells. "My mother's copy," he curtly said. Milt saw a feminine signature in the battered little copy. He was much touched by the image of Ulick's filial piety prompting him to carry about him his mother's favourite prayers—for what else are those meditations of the practically unknown mediæval monk but sighs of suffering wafted on high by a burning soul! Ulick added: "I read Petronius every day." Milt sketched a gesture of despair. He could make no answer to a man who blew hot and cold in the same breath. À Kempis and Petronius. Ormuzd and Ahriman! Apollo and Marsyas. Lucifer, when he was Prince of the Morning, and Satan Mekatrig. Milt switched the conversation.

"Among the subjects discussed the other night at the Arena you spoke of something your friend Remy de Gourmont told you. You remember? It was to this effect: that mankind, all organic life, is the slave of its reproductive organs; that those ancient cults were justified in worshipping the phallus, and the female

sex-principle. Do you know, Ulick, that the teaching of our Church doesn't widely differ from that horrible idea. Sexuality is our master—if we let it rule; from that to worship of those organs, in a word, devil worship, is only a step. I wonder you haven't noticed the grimly brief distance between the highest type of intellect, if not guided by faith, and the beasts of the field. The most depraved of degenerates sometimes have been men of lofty genius and in their fall they grovelled in filth. Gods become gorillas. De Maupassant on all fours eating his excrements, as did Voltaire; poor Nietzsche, a victim of drugs and like Stendhal slain by syphilis; Baudelaire wallowing in nastiness at his end; Heine, a victim to sexual over-indulgence, dying from tabes dorsalis; Huysmans, punished for his early blasphemies and his self-confessed degeneracies, dies of cancer in the throat; Ibsen gone mad, and the religious degenerate, Tolstoy, too; Oscar Wilde—"

"What a preacher you will make, Milt," enthusiastically exclaimed Ulick. "But while you are dragging in those awful examples, why not adduce the names of abnormally normal genius: Plato, Shakespeare, Michelangelo, Montaigne, Napoleon, Beethoven, Thackeray and their specific maladies mental and moral . . ." Milt shook his head. "I'm only thinking of you, Ulick." "Thanks for the compliment. Nice company you put me in. No wonder you recommend a course of conjugal calisthenics . . ." He laughed aloud. "No joke,

my boy. You don't drink or smoke. Good. But you are living in a bog of slimy voluptuousness. As Odo of Cluny has written of man's connection with woman: 'Quomodo ipsum stercoris saccum amplecti desideramus,' and for this 'sack of dung'—don't wince, those monks had the unpleasant habit of calling things by their right names—for this vain, skin-deep beauty, harbouring all manners of impurities, you are risking your hopes of heaven!" "How unfair you fanatics are! Why throw muck at the very source of life! We are conceived in corruption, in sin, according to the Church. But how could the Church get souls were it not for this same fornication, despised and berated? Don't speak of sanctification by the sacraments. Fornication is fornication, and were it not for the 'sin' we wouldn't be sitting here. That's what I can't understand; the divorce of theory and practice. Don't start in, Milt, let me finish first. Havelock Ellis writes: 'When we find it assumed that there are things good to do and not good to justify we may strongly suspect that we have come across a mental muddle.' And that's gospel truth. Hypocrisy rules the world. In fact, life without hypocrisy is unthinkable. They are inseparable. My friend Jules de Gaultier's philosophy is sound. Bovarysme, or the desire of man to appear other than he is. The eternal illusion. The divine humbuggery." "Hypocrisy is, as you say, necessary to screen certain unpleasant realities, Ulick. It is a pia fraus; painted

veils! painted lies. People who will persist in crudely naming unmentionable matters usually end in jail or in the lunatic asylum. Back to 'our mutton.' Why don't you marry? Believe me, the humdrum life of a bourgeois will give you the proper atmosphere for your studies. Think of your Flaubert and his laborious life, with its colourless background. He urged the young writer to be ascetic in his life, that he could be all the more violent in his art. Vance Thompson's advice is sound: Artists should marry women with the feather-bed temperament. Why are you looking like that at me, Ulick?" Ulick only smiled, but there was a covert sneer in the smile that caused Milt to blush.

"Honestly, entre-nous, Milt, you know more than a specialist in psychopathy. Now tell me, I'll keep it secret, how do you contrive to stay clear of the petticoats? It's a personal question, but I dare put it because you are so frank with me as to my own soul-hygiene. You are such an old-sniffer!" Milt didn't hesitate. "I pray. Prayer, naught else. Lead us not into temptation. Et nos inducas in tentationem. All the talk of psychologists about transposing the nervous fluid to the brain would be mere wind were it not for prayer. Faith moves mountains. Volition is born of humility and prayer. That's my secret, and it's the secret of every priest. But just to show you, Ulick, that we do not necessarily violate the laws of nature, let me quote two phrases which I copied in my note book

concerning sex. In his L'Egoisme, base de toute Société, Félix le Dantec makes rather astonishing statements, and what's more, proves their validity. The first is this: 'l'acte sexuel n'est pas un phenomène vital,' in a word, this act so often sung of by the poets, this act which assures the continuity of life, is a drama in which the living are not the chief actors; the spermatazoa and the ova are. The second proposition is: 'Les élements sexuels sont morts.' Neither one can live by itself. Nature, prompted by the divine design, brings them together in the inexpressible act, an act that even the lowest of humans always seeks the darkness to consummate. Which is a salutary hypocrisy." Ulick calmly took a book down and remarked: "Here is Le Dantec himself. But you don't quote what he says of the 'gaméte' the unfecundated sexual cells, poisoning a man swifter than does absinthe. In a word, Milt, the sexes separated are unnatural, and joined, whether in wedlock or concubinage—bedlock is the ultimate outcome—they are natural, healthy. Waldstein, Ekler and other biologists have proved that the sperma of the male actually enters into the veinal circulation of the woman. 'Bone of my bone'! You, because you lead a so-called pure life, are continually haunted by impure images."

Milt demurred, then said rather maliciously: "Ulick, who is this Dora that you and Paul Godard share so happily? Modern polyandry?" "Who told you about

her?" rudely demanded Ulick, visibly annoyed. "Little birds fly up the state even to our college. Alfred, if it will relieve you to know, was my informant." "I thought so," muttered Ulick. "Another busybody. I don't mind telling you that the psychology of Dora is as simple as a single-cell structure. She is of the genus prostitute, a superior prostitute. As false as your Hell, and as pretty as a June rose. Wouldn't you like to meet her, Milt?" "Don't talk rot, lad. Now there is another person I should like to speak of—Miss Brandès. What about her? Are you still smitten?" Ulick shook his head. "Where did you get that notion? Alfred, I suppose. Guess again. Isn't the old Adam stirring in you, Milt? Easter is a very seductive girl." This time Ulick scored a bull's-eye. His bolt made a palpable hit. From crimson Milt turned ghastly white. Irritably he took up his hat, strode to the door, but halted, controlled himself, and returned to Ulick. Putting a hand on his shoulder and peering into the young man's eyes, he said, and in affectionate tones:

"Don't worry about my condition, Ulick. God, I pray, will give me strength to fight carnal temptation. Those subtle sophists, your daily intellectual pabulum, deny the potency of prayer, yet it is one of the certitudes of our otherwise miserable existence. Once you cast on the vast current of prayer your harassed soul you are at peace with man and God. No adversity can pierce the cuirass of your soul. But, Ulick—my dear

Ulick Invern, I can't leave you without speaking to you of something that is very dear and near to me . . ." (He knows all, thought Ulick, tightly holding the back of a chair) "and that is my sister Mona. Are you behaving honourably towards her, Ulick? If not, if you are indulging in one of your numerous masculine caprices, for God's sake remember that she is my sister, the only daughter of her mother and father, who adore the girl. She is read in the 'modernity' you admire, too deeply for her spiritual repose. She is a sceptic. I am a convert. My parents are easy-going, though my mother is naturally pious. But their religion is invertebrate. Without dogma a religion is like a body without skeleton. It can't stand. It won't endure. So Mona leads too free a life. Now, Ulick, I conjure you by our friendship, don't poison that girl's mind, don't tempt her young heart." Milt's manner was cordial, even tender. He loved his friend, but he loved his sister more than a thousand friends. Ulick was moved. "I swear, Milt. I am afraid I already care too much. I'd better go back to Paris, after all." Milt took his hand. "If you love Mona, why not tell her so? She has a beautiful soul. Don't torture her any longer. She is very unhappy just now. Write her frankly, confessing your faults. She knows. She will forgive, I'm sure."

"She knows, too," cried Ulick. "Who told her? Alfred again? I think Master Alfred is riding for a fall, as far as I'm concerned . . . he is due for a good hid-

ing." "Now, don't judge too hastily, Ulick. Remember that Alfred has been a close friend of my family for years. Naturally he is interested in Mona, and doesn't wish harm to come to her." "That's why Mona went away without telling me, without saying good-bye, without writing," pondered Ulick. "That's why," answered the brother, guessing the reason of his embarrassment. "Write Mona, Ulick. Play fairly with her. I can't speak plainer. Give up your loose living. You are intended for better things. You are gifted, independent, young, above all, young. I don't advise marriage—not immediately. But don't let happiness slip through your fingers. It may offer itself but once, and you are very careless. A woman's heart contains treasures of affection. Don't waste them; cynicism is worse than corrosive-sublimate. It poisons, kills your higher brain-centres. Pardon my brotherly solicitude, Ulick. I'm a bore, but right is sometimes on the side of the stupid, and victory doesn't always perch on the banners of the intellectually elect. Write Mona, Ulick, and may God bless you." He was gone, his kind face happy with the idea of having accomplished good, before Ulick could gather his wits. The ending of this afternoon séance had been a great shock to the young man. Nor had his not particularly sensitive conscience escaped troubling. He was a Roman Catholic. He was what the world has agreed to call a gentleman; the inward monitor, out of those multiple egos, reproved

him for his manner of living, for his behaviour to that sweet, if not precisely, innocent, young woman. A virgin? Yes. How long would she remain one in his corrupting company? This question he quickly buried. What a lot of psychologic palaver over a girl, he mused. Perhaps Milt wished to marry his sister to a good parti. Dismissing this mean suggestion, he posed the naked question: "Shall or shan't I write to Mona? And if I do write, where shall I send the letter? And what shall I say to her? Go to confession, get down on my marrow-bones and say 'mea culpa'?" No, decided Ulick, as he sat down to his desk, I'll send her a fairy-tale instead of a history of my wicked life. Ulick took up his pen and began to write.

IV

From her attic of dreams, from her Tower of Ebony and spleen, Mona Milton in one of her rare morose moments, saw unrolled beneath her a double line of light. Tall poles, bearing two electric lamps, either side of the nocturnal Avenue, and casting patches of metallic blue upon the glistening pave—veritable fragments of shivering luminosity; saw the interminable stretch of humid asphalt, stippled by notes of dull crimson, the exigent lanterns of citizen-contractors. Occasional trolley-cars, projecting vivid shafts of canary colour into the mist, traversed with vertiginous speed and hollow

thunder the dreary roadway. It was midnight. On both sides of the street were buttresses of granite; at unrhythmic intervals gloomy apartment houses reared to the clouds their oblong ugliness magnetically attracting the vagrom winds which tease, agitate and buffet unfortunate people afoot in this melancholy canyon of marble, steel and speed. A belated bug-like motor-car, its antennæ vibrating with fire, tremulously slipped through the casual pools of shadowed cross-lights; swam and hummed so softly that it might have been taken for a timorous amphibian, a monster neither boat nor machine. To the faded nerves of Mona, aloft in her cage, this undulating blur of blue and grey and frosty white, these ebon silhouettes of hushed brassy palaces, and the shimmering wet night, did but evoke the exasperating tableau of a petrified Venice. A Venice overtaken by a drought eternal. Venice aerial, with cliff-dwellers in lieu of harmonious gondolas; a Venice of tarnished twilights, in which canals were transposed to the key of stone; across which trailed and dripped superficial rain from dusk and implacable skies; rain, upright and scowling. And the soul of the poetic Mona posed ironically its acid pessimism in the presence of this salty, chill and cruel city; a Venice of receded seas, a spun-steel Venice, sans hope, sans faith, sans vision.

Mona held in her hand a book of musical sketches by an author unknown to her. It was entitled Melomaniacs. It had been given to her by Ulick Invern.

But her attention had strayed from its pages to the spectacle of the night. She was not happy. Nor was she unhappy. A sense of emptiness oppressed her, the futility of matters mundane, love included, oppressed her consciousness. If she could but pin her faith to something tangible, concrete, make a definite act of affirmation before the veil of life, behind which were hidden the accomplices of her destiny. Know thyself! is wisdom, but if you are sick unto death with yourself and its petty, insistent claims upon your volitions, then forget thyself! might be a sounder motto. Mona had not the temperament dynamic; nor yet was she lymphatic. In the company of Ulick she had let herself go, as will some women in the more masterful grip of the male, without relinquishing the captaincy of her inner citadel. And now she had mentally dismissed her lover, realizing in a sudden illumination that his instability, as unstable as an anchor that drags, would be a bar to their happiness. She had tartly contradicted Alfred when he laboriously hauled out, as if from a secret place, the chief defects in Ulick's character. Yet, she recognized the justice of the impeachment. Ulick was too fond of his pleasures, and girls were no doubt the stencil of his cardinal sin. Impotent to change his volatile nature—volatile, at least, where women were concerned—she had resolved on hearing of the Dora episode to break their friendship. She felt the wrench, especially this evening. She had returned from the

seashore promising herself that she would be strong. Instead, she felt uneasy, full of barren desire, giddiness in her head and a sort of green-sickness in her stomach. She recognized the symptoms, as would any full-blooded girl of normal instincts; she also recognized the necessity of suppressing certain emotions. So she resumed reading The Rim of Finer Issues. She didn't like it as far as she had gone. The writer, evidently unformed, floundered between Henry James and the new French symbolists; psychological analysis was intermingled with symbolical prose, the admixture proving rather confusing to her tormented spirit. She longed for clarity. Still she continued to read in a cursory manner . . . Then her attention was caught by a subtitle: Frustrate. No doubt the prose-poem threatened by the heroine with the iron-coloured eyes, or was it rust-coloured hair? She read on and with increasing interest this rhapsody of the sex-cells.

"O the misty plaint of the Unconceived! O crystal incuriousness of the monad! The faint swarming toward the light and the rending of the sphere of hope, frustrate, inutile. I am the seed called Life. I am he, I am she. We walk, swim, totter and blend. Throughout the ages I dwelt in the vast basin of time. I am called by Fate into the Now. On pulsing terraces, under a noon blood-red, I dreamed of the mighty confluence. About me were my kinsfolk. Full of dumb pain we pleasured our centuries with anticipation; we

watched as we gamed away the hours. From Asiatic plateaux we swept to Nilotic slime. We roamed primeval forests, arboreally sublime, or sported with the Behemoth as we listened to the serpents' sinuous irony. We chattered with the sacred apes or mouthed at the moon; and in the Long Ago wore the carapace and danced forthright figures on coprolitic sands; sands stretching into the bosom of earth, sands woven of windy reaches, hemming the sun . . . We lay in Egyptian granaries with the grains of corn, and saw them fructify under the smile of the sphinx; we buzzed in the ambient atmosphere, gaudy dragon-flies, or as whirling motes in full cry chased by hummingbirds. Then from some cold crag we launched with wings of firebreathing pestilence and fell fathoms under sea to war with lizard-fish and narwhal, for us the supreme surrender, the joy of the expected . . . With cynical glance we saw the Buddha give way to Christ. Protoplasmically we noted the birth of planets and the confusion of creation. We saw hornéd monsters become gentle ruminants and heard from the treetops the scream of the pterodactyl dwindle to child's laughter. We heard, we saw, we felt, we knew. Yet we hoped on. Every monad has its day . . . One by one the inchoate billions disintegrated as they floated into formal life. And we watched and waited. Our evolution had been the latest, until heartsick with longing many of my brethren wished for annihilation. . . .

Save one I was at last alone. The time of my fruition was not far. O for the moment when I should realize my dreams! . . . I saw my companion swept away, swept down to the vistas of life, the thunderous surge of passion singing in her ears. O that my time would come! After vague alarms I was summoned . . . My hour had struck. Eternity was behind me, eternity loomed ahead, implacable, furrowed by the scars of Time. I heard the voice of my foreordained mate in the Cosmos. I tarried not as I ran the race. Moments were priceless; a moment meant æons; and then leaping into the light—Alas! I was too late . . . Of what use now my travail, my countless preparations? O Chance! O Fate! I am become one of the silent multitude of the Frustrate . . ."

That's an ambitious attempt to compress the evolutionary process into a page, she reflected. On the shelf devoted to her beloved Frenchmen she took down A Rebours and read what Huysmans wrote of the poem in prose of Mallarmé's in particular . . . "the adjective placed in such an ingenious and definite way that it . . . would open up such perspectives that the reader would dream whole weeks together on its meaning at once precise and multiple, affirm the present, reconstruct the past, divine the future of the characters revealed by the light of the unique epithet . . . a spiritual collaboration by consent between ten superior persons scattered through the universe . . ."

"I confess I'm not one of the ten," said Mona aloud, for she often wedded her interior dialogue to the exterior. "I should die of mental starvation on such a condensed literary diet; it may be poetic, but it is too peptonic, and my soul can't be fed with prose pemmican. Yet Frustrate is a strange panorama of sex and evolution. 'Every monad has its day.' True, I wonder if this orchestra of cells that I call 'Moi' will ever have its day? The time of my fruition is afar. Who is the Siegfried that will release this Brunnhilde from her bed of fire? That's a question which every girl puts to herself in a thousand different forms. I should like to be married. I love children. There is no other adequate method to lure them into this chilly life but the mating of men and women. Really, Mona, does the man matter much? Eugenics, a fine word for an impossible thing! I like Ulick. He wouldn't make me happy, I know. But what's the difference if I can hold his baby and mine to my breast? Nothing else counts. I'm in a nice depressed mood tonight. I mustn't forget to take a pill. It's usually the liver, and calomel is the last resource of the virtuously bilious. Oh! dear, I wonder what he is doing now? With that horrid woman? Not that I care. Why should I? Ulick is nothing to me. Young men must observe the laws of hygiene or else be ill, so he says. I believe him. What about women? Are they so differently constructed? Saints? I don't believe it. If we were frank, we should

tell the whole truth—women are much more amorous than men, although the emotion with us is more massive, yet more diffused. There! I've told my mirror the truth. Polichinelle's secret. Because of our excessive temperament we have been put behind bars for ages. Heavens! Every household is a harem with one lawful wife; the concubines live elsewhere. Some day women will go on a sex-strike. Then the men will crawl. If it's right for the men to go philandering, why isn't it right for the women? I wonder what Milt would say if he could peep into my brain at this moment? Horrified he would surely be. That Dora! Alfred Stone says she is very pretty. Pooh! I know what his 'pretty' means. A lascivious kitten. But she serves the purpose. I don't mind the physical facts; man have strong stomachs, but how can a superior young man like Ulick stand the vulgarity, the stupidity of such a girl! Maybe she isn't stupid or vulgar. That singer, Esther Brandès, is a law unto herself; no doubt has a regular flock of lovers . . . artistic women are privileged . . . I wish I was an artistic woman. I've never had a real affair. If these monads of mine are to have their day it's high time they began. Only to think of it, I was once spoony over Alfred. I can't endure his presence now. They say we always return to our first loves. What nonsense. We usually turn down a side street when we see an old beau approaching. I know I do. I wonder whether Ulick really was

in earnest about our dream-children? Our monads must have been mighty lively when we held hands at the Casino and at Martin's. What were their names, those children? Shamus, Tenth Earl, or is it Marquis of Thingamajig somewhere in Ireland? Shamus and———? Wasn't there a horse or a mare in the dream? Yes, yes, I have it, Brunnhilde's white horse, or was it one of the white horses of Rosmersholm? No, it wasn't Ibsen at all, it was Wagner. Grane! Aha! That's it. Grane and Shamus. What darlings they must be, and their mother who conceived and bore them never saw them except in her dreams. But they are more real than flesh and blood children. Our dream-children. I'm beginning to think I love Ulick . . . Oh! he is a dear. I'd better go to bed or I'll end a lunatic. When a woman ceases to be mistress of herself she is likely to become the mistress of a man. Dreams. Heigho! Now for my bed of tormenting fire not on Brunnhilde's fire-begirt rock, but between my sheets. But the fire is there just the same . . . the fire . . . the lovely, teasing fire that brings dreams . . . and Ulick . . . and our dream-children, Shamus and Grane . . . Shamus . . ."

V

Mentally refreshed after her monologue and physically buoyant because of a dreamless night Mona ate a

hearty breakfast. No lilies and languor for her in the golden morning hours. She read a newspaper. Her appetite for the realities we call "life" was fresh; in the evening she couldn't bear the sight of printed news. The post brought her two letters. One told her that her subscription to a musical publication had expired; a glance at the superscription of the other sent her scurrying upstairs to her Ebony Tower, as she fantastically named her study. It was from him, the father of her dream-children, the one man in the world for her. As if dazzled by an unexpected flash of lightning she saw the truth; she loved Ulick Invern. She must make him her husband,—or? . . . She read his letter. It began thus:

"Grane and Shamus stood near the big tree in the cool park listening to the song of the leaves. This tree had been nice to them, no branches had harshly croaked: 'Go away. I hate little boys and girls.' This tree they heard saying nice things about them to the cross, crooked crab-apple tree next to it. . . . They loved the singing trees. They loved to be under the 'few large stars,' their faces buffeted by sudden little winds from the lazy white clouds in the sky. They were not keeping faith with their mamma. They had promised to be home before dusk and yet they lingered in the twilight park as if they were birds that perched and slept in the hollow night. Their mother longed for them and sent Nursie to fetch them home. But the

voices of the leaves held them captive; they overheard the strange secrets and sorrows of the trees. 'O, if only we could run about like those queer human children! Moving plants. If only our branches, which are our arms, could become free and fly through the air instead of cowardly waving to the prompting of every vagrant breeze. Alas! we are rooted in the soil. What crime did our arboreal ancestors commit that we must so suffer and atone for it? In what faraway forest is buried the sinister evidence of the trees' fall from grace?' Shamus nudged Grane. 'Do you hear what the trees are telling us?' 'Of course I do, Shamus,' pertly answered Grane, 'but I don't understand them any more than you do.' 'Grane, I'm afraid, let's go back to the house.' 'Cry-baby,' retorted his sister, 'I'm not a bit afraid.' They lingered on. The trees still babbled. Then the clear voice of Nursie reached their ears. 'Grane! Shamus! Your mamma wants you to come in right away. Papa is asking for you.' Hand in hand they traversed the field; it didn't seem so big now. They saw a sickle of silver fire floating over the tree tops. It was the new moon. Elated, they both wished that their mamma would reveal the secret of the trees. She gently smiled at their insistent questioning. 'The trees,' she explained, 'were naughty once upon a time in the long-ago. They disobeyed their parents and left their cabin in the woods. Soon they were lost and begged to be shown the way back in the black dark-

ness. Alarmed by their lamentings, the moon appeared and pointed the path of light to their house. They promised never to leave their roots any more.' She looked at Grane and Shamus, and at their papa. He bowed his head. He, too, had wandered in the dark forest and had been lost like the little trees. Then the mamma took her darlings to her bosom and over their tiny golden heads she smiled—a smile of tender pity and forgiveness."

Her eyes swimming with unshed tears Mona threw herself on the bed, her burning cheeks buried in a pillow. This whimsical letter profoundly moved her. Every fibre of longing, of sweet desires, of craving motherhood tugged at her heart, knocked at the door of her soul and unbidden entered and took possession . . . Milt would have told her that seven evil ones possessed her; but she knew better. She was, at last, a woman, with a woman's complex passion, and also a woman's stern purpose. Every monad has its day, she sobbed, but remained dry-eyed. I mean to have mine. Now or never . . . It was three o'clock in the afternoon when Mona passed her mother in the doorway. "Where in the world are you off to so late, Mona? It's surely going to rain and you haven't your umbrella. Dear, dear, what a forgetful girl you are." "I'm only going across the park, mamma, and if it threatens, I'll run home," she explained; but her mother shook her head. "You will get wet, and then it will

be too late to return." Mona went her way but said naught of her secret errand.

VI

Ulick was reading Le Jardin de Bérénice in his music-room. He had not enjoyed his luncheon, and fearing sleep, for he detested afternoon naps, he took refuge in the pages of the subtle Barrès. It was beginning to darken, though it couldn't have been more than four o'clock, but rain had set in and he was about to turn on the lights when he heard taps on his glass door; this tapping was immediately followed by the entrance of Mona, veiled, and mysterious. He couldn't refrain from frowning, and then he hoped she hadn't noticed his dissatisfaction. She went to him and kissed him. Ulick, surprised, kept his head. "You darling Mona, and I had never expected to see you again." And with that he grasped her and the lovers embraced. Mona made no pretence of coyness. She hugged Ulick as if for the last time. Tears rolled down her cheeks. He was greatly touched, also alarmed by her fervour. But he asked no explanation of her conduct in running away from him; she vouchsafed none. They were happy to be together. What the use of words! He finally begged of her, seeing that she was pale from emotion, to remove her hat and wraps, and he made

her sit on the couch close to him. After a pause, she said:

"Ulick, our children, our dream-children, they are born at last, and they are loved by their parents, are they not?" He smiled, though he felt uncomfortable at this putting of the horses behind the cart; in fact, his conscience was beginning to toll warning bells. He had solemnly promised Milt, had he not, and in this very room, that he would respect his sister! And here she was, that adorable sister, in his arms, only a few days after the interview with her brother. Ulick resolved on stern conduct. He gently drew away from Mona and looked at her as steadily as his beating arteries would permit him. She sat up and asked: "Ulick, you have something on your mind. What is it, dearie?" He winced. The same depressing word that Dora always used. He loathed it. It was so commonplace; worse, it had such a "professional" ring. Hearing it now gave him a mental excuse for reaction. He rose, pressed a button, and the apartment became cruelly illuminated. Mona blinked, shaded her eyes with her veil. She didn't like such a glare, she told him. She was irritated. Her current had been turned off, that electric current of the sexes. Ulick sat down before his study table. He was already bored; she recognized the symptoms. He drummed with his fingers, his glance went over her head. Evidently he wished her

away. She regretted the generous élan that had propelled her into his arms. But she didn't stir from the couch. Another pause, long, distressing to both. Ulick yawned. This was the culminating insult. Her pride pricked, she sat rigid as a candle and regarded the man she loved, the man who fathered her dream-children. Then, "Ulick," she whispered, "Ulick, my love, come to me. Don't let silly reasons keep us apart any longer. Ulick, I say, come at once to your mamma, your little mamma. Oh! Ulick don't forget Grane and Shamus." She stamped her foot. She was growing excited, and Ulick wished himself a thousand miles away. He knew where this would lead. He didn't trust his nerves, which always played him false with women. He knew that his promises to Milt were as naught if this enchanting girl opened her arms. And now she was opening those seductive arms. He felt lost. He didn't think of the future, of marriage; the vivid moment overwhelmed him, swept him down to disaster, a disaster that would be shared—oh! how bitterly shared—by this imprudent girl. Imprudent? Better say, crazy girl.

He paced the floor. He made up his mind to vanish altogether rather than fall into the burning pit. Milt's phrase came to his memory. Suddenly he resolved on a plan of action. He turned to her. "Mona," he said, "it's getting late. It's raining. Hadn't we better be

going?" She didn't budge. He felt ashamed at the crudity of his speech. He had ardently longed for this meeting, and now he was acting like a cowardly eunuch. Mona grasped his hand as he irresolutely stood before her. "Ulick, don't let us waste our happiness. Jewel, love, I'm here. I came to you. I am the suitor. Take me, Jewel, take me. Tomorrow it may be too late." The rising storm was ominously hysterical. She was becoming uncontrollable. She tried to drag him down to her. He resisted her tumultuous onset, blushing like a virgin. Obstinately she tugged at his arm, sitting all the while. For an instant "nymphomaniac" flashed across his consciousness. He dragged his arm from her grasp.

"The open door, the open door to freedom, Jewel," she gasped, and arising she seized him with such passion that he was panic-stricken. He ran into his bedroom, bolting the door. Mona, now quite beside herself, reached the switchboard and the room was darkened. She went to the closed door and began beating upon its panels with her fists.

"The open door, Ulick, the open door!" she cried and her voice had the accents of a delirious woman. "Oh, please, for God's sake open the door, Jewel—" "It's surely maternal nymphomania," he muttered on the other side of the door. "What shall I do? If she keeps on shrieking she will alarm the house—perhaps

the police—horrible!—an ambulance—the police-station—the scandal—her parents—Milt—my God! what shall I do?—" The pounding redoubled. She moaned.

"Make me a woman, Jewel, make me a woman! Open the door, make me a woman!" Perspiration almost blinded him. Make her a woman! . . . She was the stronger . . . as strong as death . . .

The door slowly opened. Mona fell into his arms, still sobbing: "Make me a woman, Jewel, make me a woman . . ."

Mona on reaching her home didn t go into the dining-room; instead she rang for her maid and bade her bring tea and toast to the studio; she had a headache, and please let her mother and father know that she wouldn't come down to dinner. Then she went to her mirror and carefully searched as if she were seeking something. Her features were not discomposed, her expression as usual; perhaps she was a trifle paler than her wont, otherwise—rien! Yes, her eyes seemed as if they had been well-washed, as if a beneficent rain had carried away all the signs of discontent, rebellion, unhappiness. Mona tried to imagine herself supremely happy. She wasn't. Then impatiently snapping her fingers she looked at her doll on the bed: "It's frightfully overadvertised, Dolly, that's what love is." Dolly only stared, sphinx-wise.

VII

One evening Ulick leaned over Dora's balcony. He had called unannounced, and found her in anything but an amiable mood. "It's you, is it?" was her reception. He had not been very attentive of late, and Dora, despite her kittenish airs, was strictly business in her methods. With her, one nail replaced another. The devil take the hindmost. If you haven't any money, you needn't come around. Time is money. What are you here for? When you're dead, you're dead a long time. She was fond of repeating this chaplet of pearly wisdom as she faced her favourite work of art, framed and hung on the alcove of her bedchamber: "Rock of Ages cleft for me" was the legend this lovely picture bore. Dora, who wasn't particularly imaginative, saw herself as the attudinizing female who so closely clung to the cross in a typhoon that would have sunk a fleet, but didn't disturb her chaste draperies. She impressed Dora. A vague notion nestled in the recesses of her conscience that she wasn't precisely leading a noble life, and that the necessary rock of ages for her was a comfortable bank account.

He was not disturbed by her cool phrase. It wasn't a novelty. He stared at the town and thought that when the softer and richer symphony of the night arrives, when the jarring of one's ego by the innumer-

able racking noises has ceased, when the city is preparing to forget the toilsome day, then the magic of New York begins to operate; its missing soul peeps forth in the nocturnal transfiguration. However, not on Broadway, with its thousand lights and lies, not in opera-houses, theatres, or cafés, but from some perch of vantage must the nocturnal scene with all its mysterious melancholy beauty be studied. He saw a cluster of blazing lights across at the West Side Circle, a ladder of fire the pivot. Further down theatre-land dazzled with its tongues of flame. Literally, a pit, white-hot. Across in the cool shadows of the east are level lines of twinkling points. The bridges. There is always the sense of waters not afar. The hotels are tier upon tier starry with illumination. The Avenues, long shafts of bluish-white electric globed fire. The monoliths burn as if to a fire-god their votive offerings. In the moonlight mansions on Fifth Avenue seemed snow-driven. The Synagogue opposite the park, half Byzantine, half Moresque, might have been mistaken for an Asiatic mosque as it lay sleeping in the moon-rays. The park, as if liquefied, flowed in plastic rhythms, a lake of velvety foliage, a mezzotint dividing the east from the west. Sudden furnace bonfires leap up from the Brooklyn side; they are purely commercial; Ulick looked for Whistler's rockets. Battery Place and the Bay are operatic, the stage for a thrilling fairy spectacle. The dim, scattered plain of granite house-tops

are like a petrified cemetery of immemorial Titans. At night, he mused, the city loses its New-World aspect. It reveals the patina of Time. It is a city exotic, semi-barbaric, the fantasy of an Oriental sorcerer who had been mad enough to evoke from unplumbed and forgotten seas the long lost Atlantis . . .

The buzzing of the annunciator, a man's voice aroused Ulick from his reverie. He hopped into the room where he found Paul. The greeting of the pair was cordial; there wasn't the slightest feeling of jealousy between them, and this was something Dora detested. Competition is the life of cocottes, she declared early and often. In her felire fashion she had tried to arouse the jealousy of Paul and Ulick, but vainly. Ulick was touchy when Easter's name was in the mouth of Paul, and he knew that if Paul ever dared to speak of Mona disrespectfully, he would smash him. But jealousy over Dora? Pas pour trois sous!

Dora was a safe port in emotional storms. When all fruit fails welcome haws, runs the adage. Ulick had been on the jagged edge of ennui ever since the visit of Mona. He hadn't the courage to look into his soul, black with a viler sin. To distract himself, like the man who drinks to forget, he had gone up to Dora's overlooking the fact that it was, for all he knew, Paul's "evening at home." Still, no bones were broken and he shook Paul's hand and said bienvenu! Dora glowered. She talked to herself. She went into the

kitchen and raised her voice to the new cook. She noisily rattled dishes, pushed the furniture and behaved like a woman misunderstood. She, too, had her grievances. These fellows of hers weren't behaving on the square. Now, what did Ulick Invern mean by coming up when he knew he would run into Paul! Did he do it on purpose, just to annoy her? She whimpered in the pantry as she took down the decanter of whisky and put the glasses on a tray; whatever else might be criticized in her conduct no one ever would accuse her of inhospitality. This consoling idea struck her and to drive it home more securely in her self-esteem she helped herself to a generous drink. It was not the first "hooker" she had drunk that day; in fact, she was admirably intoxicated when Ulick arrived, and she knew that he noticed it. It was her standing grievance against him that he couldn't be persuaded to drink or smoke. It seemed to put him on a pedestal above her and she hated pedestals. Now there was Paul—always half-stewed . . . She fetched in the liquor.

They played cards, that is, Dora and Paul wrangled over some game, Ulick interesting himself in a newspaper; there wasn't a book in the apartment fit to open. Dora's dissatisfaction grew apace. Slapping the cards down she called to Ulick: "You're the nice one I don't think. You don't drink or smoke, you can't even play poker. What are you good for anyhow?" Bored, Ulick went into the hall after his hat and stick.

The hints of Dora were not cryptic. He felt that three is company, two none, and he determined to leave them to their desperate ennui à deux. But he had counted without Paul.

"Where are you off to, old top?" Paul asked. "Wait a bit and I'm with you." Dora revolted. "You make me tired, both of you. First Ulick, then you, Paul, and you're going to see the girls, I swear to that." "No," politely contradicted Paul, "no girls when we can have your company, Dodo." "That's why you slip away and leave me to spend the evening alone within four walls. Well, that's where you'll get left. I'm going to ring for a taxi and I'll go across to Edie's. She always has company." She was again on the verge of tears. Paul's next speech precipitated the explosion, though from an unexpected quarter. Turning to Ulick he had banteringly remarked:

"Jewel, I'm off to Europe Saturday. I'm going to Paris on the fastest boat I can get, the 'Deutschland'. I hope to see Easter in Paris. Shall I give her your love?" He meant it innocently, but his manner proved the red rag to the bull. Ulick became pale, surest sign that he was angered. He didn't answer at once, then, as he stood in the doorway, he said in his chilliest voice: "I never discuss ladies with such men as you and particularly in such surroundings." This rude speech sent Paul up into the air; he, too, had been drinking far more than was good for him. He went over to Ulick

and said: "What's the matter with you? Can't I mention Easter's name without you rearing on your hind legs? Perhaps I should have asked for Mona's permission"—He got no further. Ulick's reach was long, his attack swift—he hadn't studied for naught boxing with his father's old fencing-master, an Irishman, in Paris. He landed his "left" full on Paul's chest and Paul reached the floor amid a huge clatter of displaced chairs, the table, its glasses and decanter. He lay there, not so much stunned, as reflective. Decidedly he was not in the same class with this heroic Franco-American. Dora came to the rescue with screams of rage. Aroused by the scrimmage a coloured girl stood staring from the kitchen, the whites of her eyes like cream, thunder-curdled. She proved the lightning-rod that drew off the accumulated electricity of Dora, who was fearful that the row had been overheard in the eminently respectable house. She flew at the unfortunate cook.

"Get to hell out of here!" she shouted, then turned on her guests. Ulick, shamefaced, stammered an excuse as he helped Paul to his feet. This proved the acme of Dora's unhappiness. "As for you two, you clear out. I've no use for you. Always hanging around with your nasty messing ways. Clear out, both of you, or I'll call the police. Ruining my reputation with your scrapping. I won't have it here, I tell you. My lease says no fighting is allowed on the premises, and what have you fellows been doing? Get away. I won't hear

any excuses. And fighting about two ladies"—she sarcastically lowered her voice at the mention of ladies—"Nice ladies they must be. Sly sluts, that's what they are. Don't tell me. Little Dora knows your fine society dames, your artistic ladies—whores the whole lot of them." With that she bundled her "gentlemen friends" out of the apartment. "Good-bye, Dodo," cried Paul. "I'll drop in to say a last good-bye before Saturday." But the door slammed for an answer and presently they were on the lift and soon in the street. Paul, his good temper reasserting itself, passed his arm through the abashed Ulick's, and casually exclaimed: "I say, old man, you have a punch! Let's walk down to the Utopian. The fresh air will do me good. But am I thirsty!" The young men slowly moved down the Avenue arm in arm, apparently the best of friends. . . . Late that night Dora was brought home by two "lady-friends" in a shockingly intoxicated condition.

VIII

. . . Time fugued. Being no longer under the obligation of visiting Dora since the shindy he had made in her home, Ulick became truly intimate with Mona. They lived like sensible married people. They walked in the park. They went to the theatre, to concerts and the opera. They met every afternoon. At least three times a week Mona took luncheon at the Maison Felicé.

She was not noticed there any more than the other ladies who came with their lovers. She would then go afterward to Ulick's rooms, where he played Chopin for her, read to her, made love to her; passionate love. She had revised that first hasty judgment and now found the life sensual an entrancing experience. She had confessed to him her disappointments, and for answer he read aloud Stendhal's Lamiel, that extraordinary unfinished fiction, with Lamiel's similar adventure. "Is that all?" asks this disconcerting heroine, after she had bribed with silver a stout peasant lad to induct her into the mystery of sex. This episode revolted Mona, who saw in love but one object—children. Ulick realized now it was maternity suppressed that had sent her to him knocking at his closed door. Love with her was not only a sensation but also a sentiment. She was not a sentimental girl. She loved Ulick, but she loved children more. "The sacred wound of maternity" was a phrase that appealed to her; it was thus she had heard called the semi-mysterious function of the lunar sex; that sex upon which the moon had impressed its rhythms. Mona, under the skin, was a matter-of-fact woman for whom Mother Nature could do no wrong. She loved children, and in default of them she delighted in the poetic fiction of dream-children. Ulick had only to pronounce the names of Grane and Shamus to see her face swept as if by joy-

ful news. Temperamentally she was elected to happy motherhood. This idea caused him much disquietude.

With intense interest he read of Easter's début at Munich. She had sung Isolde with immense success. The cables were choked with stories of her brilliant singing, dramatic acting. The three Brunnhildes followed, and a few weeks later a royal command came from Baireuth; Queen Cosima graciously permitted the American girl to be a "guest" for a week. Again—Isolde, Brunnhilde, and most startling of all—Kundry. She would be the first American to sing in Parsifal at Baireuth. After that, offers from Paris, Berlin, London, and no doubt, from New York. But the Metropolitan House management was impenetrable. Easter had changed her name to Istar. . . . Istar the daughter of sin! chuckled Alfred Stone. . . .

THE SIXTH GATE

At the sixth gate, the warden stripped her; he took the rings from her feet, the rings from her hands. . . .

I

Ulick earnestly pondered the character of Mona. Their long conversations about the world, the flesh, and the devil revealed, as in a mirror, her soul. She was essentially a pure girl, because she saw no evil in life. Nature was her sole standard. A pantheist in petticoats. She was as severe in her strictures upon prudish women as her mother was in her judgments upon the contemporaneous girl. Ulick called it an inverted dogmatism. But, then, he reflected, scratch any woman and you come on a squaw; only the squaw is truer to type than the modern woman. He noted, too, the gradual encroachment upon his time, his spirit, of Mona. Her tenacity alarmed him. She said nothing about marriage; that side of the question never obtruded. Mona was a free-thinker à outrance; a law unto herself. She seemed to be without the prejudices of her sex. She didn't interest herself in the woman-question, which she believed was purely an individual one. Let each woman agitate for herself. Let her revolt be within four walls. Let every tub stand on its own bottom. The most refractory male is always forced to lower his standard before the conquering arms of woman. Rabelais—or is it Balzac?—calls it by its true

name: the glue-pot of love. Walt Whitman goes him one better. Nevertheless, Ulick detected signs of the tyrannical female in her perpetual hovering about him. Even of the most tender, flower-like women one might say: This is the shrew Shakespeare drew. Every woman is a potential shrew, he decided, and Ophelia would have been no exception if she had married Hamlet. All men are born to be henpecked. Celibates, whether priests or laymen, are not exempted from this primal curse. If it isn't a female relative then it's a housekeeper, a cook or a laundress. Down-trodden women are to blame for their supine attitude. Let them fly the flag of revolt. The men will soon surrender.

Finally, one spring afternoon in the park, they settled these burning problems of humanity and were strolling by the swan-boats when they were hailed by Dora, who, to the critical eye of Ulick, had never been prettier. She accosted the couple quite unabashed.

"Hello, Jewel!" she cried, and she smiled at Mona, who returned the smile, and thought that Ulick might have kept his pet name for her benefit. Ulick was embarrassed only a moment. He expected to see fur fly and when nothing happened he introduced the girls in formal fashion. Mlle. Dora, Mlle. Mona. Et voilà tout! As a foreigner their introduction revolted his taste. Some hazy idea born of the notion that here in America the social lines were not so rigidly marked, had forced him into a false position. He looked around

him. He was fearful that acquaintances might see the absurd group: the harlot and the mistress. What to do now! Mona saved the situation by her aplomb. She chatted with Dora, who, as soon as she was put on a level with the other woman, began to exhibit signs of discomfort. Her native insouciance had prompted her to hold up Ulick merely to annoy Mona. This manœuvre failing she had to fall back into her own rank, which she did, precipitately.

"Well, I must be goin'," she said. "Pleased to have met you, Miss—Mademoiselle—I forget. Jewel's French names give me a grouch—Miss Mona." She made a little curtsey. "Ulick, I live in the same apartment. I'm a regular homebody. So run up, whenever you have a night free—that is if your sweetheart will let you. You don't mind me, Jewel and me are such old friends." She flitted away. Mona had smiled sweetly. Ulick was wrathful. It was Dora's method of revenge because of his prolonged absence; he hadn't seen her since the night of his tiff with Paul. He hastened to apologize for the contretemps. Mona didn't mind, so she told him. She only registered her feelings in an ironical aside: "Charming friend of yours, Miss Dora." Then they talked of other things.

Living as husband and wife, they pooled their intimacies and discussed life as if they spent it in domestic seclusion. They almost did. Only at dinner time did Mona go home. She had said nothing of Ulick to her

parents, nor had she asked Ulick to call. That puzzled him. Certainly she was not ashamed of him. She paraded herself everywhere with him. They often met Alfred, who now took their friendship as a matter of course. He teased them, asking if the day had been announced, but he seldom visited the Maison Felicé. He told Ulick that he had finer fish to fry, and taunted him with being a sentimentalist.

"Not that Mona isn't a superior girl. She is wonderful. But you are more wonderful. You, of all men, to fall in so speedily. I'm afraid, Jewel, you will make a sorry husband. You should have remained in Paris. And what will our dear old Easter, the celebrated Wagner singer, Istar, say when she hears that her young man has deserted her?" At Easter's name Ulick's brow wrinkled. His only answer was "Qui sait?"

. . . One afternoon in early summer Mona visited Ulick. He was looking from his window at a flock of pigeons on the roof of the dining-room. As soon as Mona entered he noted her blithe June air, but the expression of her eyes evoked autumnal cemeteries. "What's up, little mamma?" he asked as he embraced her. She buried her head in his breast. "I'm out of breath, Jewel," she panted. "I think mother followed me today. She has been spying on me most curiously for the past month. I wonder if she suspects?" "She wouldn't be a woman if she didn't. You give her lots

of reasons to suspect—" he added, and at once regretted having spoken. Mona withdrew her arms and going to the couch sat down and incontinently burst into tears. In a moment Ulick was consoling her. She enjoyed a copious weeping, and drying her eyes she took him into her confidence.

No, there couldn't be the slightest doubt . . . Three months had passed. Nothing! Perhaps her mother had been keeping tabs. Prudent mothers do, and if her darling old mumsey was innocent of the world's way, she possessed the common-sense of the average woman, more sense, in fact, than her dear father, always dreaming over chess or metaphysical problems. Although for months he had been expecting just such news Ulick couldn't repress a long whistle; then he gave her a bear-hug. She nestled, closed her eyes with a sigh of profound contentment. He studied her face. There were violet bruises under her eyes, and her features had become measurably meagre. Her high cheek-bones showed more saliently. Her plump body felt softer to his touch. Good God! She was enceinte, and there sat the pair of them without a sense of guilt, shame, or worriment over the future. Modern? Disgusting! Gently releasing her he began to pace the floor. She watched him. She was perfectly content. There is no tomorrow for such love. The pain in store for her, the world's censure, the shock to her poor parents, the outraged pride that would be Milt's—none

of these things mattered now. She would in due time become a mother. She was in the family-way—homely, eloquent phrase, for some girls the abomination of desolation, whether married or single; for Mona a clear title to happiness. Oh! the joys of motherhood. A live lump of flesh in her bosom. Her flesh and Jewel's! What matters a ring, a bit of parchment, a ceremony? Nature, generous, glorious Nature, had performed this miracle in her behalf. She had in the recesses of her being created life. Illegitimate? There are no such monsters. All babies are legitimate and bastards are sometimes more beautiful. In the fulness of her heart, from which the mouth speaketh, she uttered all these ideas to her lover, and he smiled, too; was he not above vulgar prejudice! Marry her? Of course, in the twinkling of an eye, when she wished. She was too proud, too happy to mention the odious word. Wait till baby was born; that was the only thing that mattered. What could count in comparison with that magnificent fact—a healthy boy baby! Mona fairly snuggled in Ulick's arms. Her eyes were wet with maternal ecstasy. No nymphomania in this darling woman, thought Ulick.

Nevertheless, he began to take the affair more tragically. Suppose her parents would cast her off! Suppose that Milt would avenge her dishonour! Suppose that she died in accouchement! Suppose—she stayed his mouth and called him a croaking raven. Suppose

anything, for that matter. Milt didn't count. He wouldn't be home at the time—she computed on her fingers—and as to her parents, she hadn't made up her mind on any plan of action. She knew that she couldn't, or wouldn't, come out flatly now with the truth. That way would be disaster. How could she go away and write those dear little unworldly people? That would be cowardice. No, whatever course she would adopt, she must remain near her father and mother. She must shock them, also console them. Refusal of their forgiveness she did not anticipate. Only—only, one obstacle loomed ahead—their treatment of her Jewel, of the father of her beloved unborn child. Supposing she gave birth to twins! Grane and Shamus! What a paradise life would be! At once she saw herself playing with her babies in her Ebony Tower, converted into a nursery, a super-nursery for their super-babies, she playfully told him. He couldn't view the case so disinterestedly.

"Yes, but darling girl, the chief bother to me is what will your parents say—or do—to me? I'll only be a commonplace seducer in their eyes. Old-fashioned people can't shed their prejudices as snakes shed their skins. I fear a big row. Naturally, we must get married—at once; Mona, immediately!" He said this but his words lacked steam and sincerity to the acute ear of the girl. She felt assured that he saw no other girl save her, yet she knew young men, knew Ulick,

knew that his hell of good intentions was often paved with fickle promises. Let matters take their natural course without undue meddling. After baby was born it would be time enough to discuss matrimony. That she was challenging by her unusual conduct worldly judgments she knew. Never cross a bridge till you reach one. Oh! her baby, her baby boy, her Shamus—maybe her Grane, her little white Wagnerian pony. She laughed.

He resumed his futile rambling round the room. An idea, a disagreeable idea, was crystallizing. Why not? Other women have undergone the peril. After several shaky beginnings, he finally compromised with his conscience by whispering in her ear. She blushed. Then repulsing him she exclaimed, No! And he had never expected such decision from a girl of her easy-drifting nature. "And you born a Roman Catholic!" she sorrowfully concluded. Ruefully he acquiesced. There was no way out. Abortion is the resort of assassins. What else? Matrimony would solve the question. Then Mona could possess her soul in peace. She could have her baby, to be sure, a few months ahead of time, but she could look her world in the eye. There was further palaver, nothing decided upon. She embraced Jewel and went home in a taxi, because, as she told herself, she must not take any chances. Already she felt life within her; her breakfasts she got rid of in a summary fashion, as she was too nauseated to swal-

low them. Tea she could manage. Eggs—ugh! The symptoms were classic, her case normal. But never would she consent to destroy sentient life. No such via dolorosa was in store for her.

A few weeks later just as Ulick was leaving to "cover" the first night of "The Lady With the Lace Legs" at the Empire, he was intercepted by Madame Felicé, whose kindly face wore a worried expression: "Monsieur Invern, you are demanded on the telephone. Il y en a quelque chose de grave pour vous. I hope your young lady, cette charmante fille, Mlle. Mona, is not so ill as they say. Mais dépêchez-vous, cher Monsieur! On vous attend." Ulick took up the receiver. A woman's voice asked in quavering accents: "Is this Mr. Invern?" "Yes." "This is Mrs. Milton, Mona's mother. You know where we live, yes? Please come up at once. Mona is ill—very ill—she may not last through the night. You know what's the matter. Oh! Do come! She asks for you whenever the pains allow her. Don't fear coming, Mr. Invern. Her father understands. Only—hurry—for God's sake hurry!" At his side the Madame had clearly heard every word. But what mattered that? She was hugely tolerant. She wasn't a gossip. And now she was most sympathetic. While he rang up his newspaper she sent out for a taxi. He soon finished with his night editor. He felt ill. Couldn't the city department get someone to cover the operetta? Besides, he was only obliging his con-

frère, the music-critic who had a poker party on at his house. Music was not in Ulick's bailiwick. The affair was soon settled. Fifteen minutes later he was ringing at the Miltons'.

II

A maid opened the door. Her face was drawn, and she enveloped the half-frantic young man in a hostile gaze. He felt like a guilty scoundrel. Evidently he was in for a hard night, but he didn't trouble about himself. His unique sorrow was Mona. He walked up and down the semi-darkened drawing-room. A premature birth. Without doubt. It could be nothing else, unless—unless an accident had supervened. Perhaps his darling had been run down by some selfish brute of a motorist—Mona was so imprudent—he was become well-nigh frantic when Mrs. Milton entered. He thought her positively angelic when she came to him and took his hand in hers. "Don't worry too much, Mr. Invern. Mona is better since she knows you are here. No, no! I shan't listen to any accusations. . . . We understand, and to understand is to forgive. Mr. Milton thinks as I do. How did it happen! Mona was nearly killed by an auto this morning. She crossed the avenue dreaming of her future happiness. Yes, the sweet child has told us all. Don't be shocked. Girls have different moral codes today and parents must try

to sympathize with them; if they do not, then they can't be of use to their daughters—and that would be terrible. The wheels missed her but she received a glancing blow on the shoulder and arm. She fell, and heavily, but she didn't faint. The gentleman in the car drove her home. He was very much concerned, although I am sure he was not to blame. The doctor said the blow was superficial. He bandaged her shoulder, and put her arm in a sling"—Ulick buried his face in his hands and groaned:

"Poor, suffering Mona!" Her mother touched his arm reassuringly. "All went well till late this afternoon. Mona began to suffer atrociously. Pains in her abdomen. They were so terrible that I summoned the doctor again. She didn't mind him, she was suffering so: He hinted at the shock and asked to examine her, fearing, no doubt, peritonitis. And that's precisely what it is . . . as soon as he saw her poor swollen figure . . . Of course, he knew at once . . . and that brave girl never flinched. Her first question was the safety of the . . . of her child . . . when he told her the truth. Tears rolled down her cheek . . . that, and no thought of disgrace troubled her . . . she bites the pillow-case when the pains return, she won't scream . . . such a brave girl. . . . She holds as tight as her strength allows that big doll of hers. . . . Oh, Mr. Invern, don't cry. Be brave. You must see her . . . she doesn't speak of anyone but you—she says you are her dear husband

—as you are in the sight of God—No, Mr. Milton takes the thing philosophically. He entertains no harsh thoughts concerning you. Young people! Ah! Mr. Invern, this is a sad meeting. My son Milt has spoken so often of you, and so beautifully—why didn't Mona tell us of her love for you? We should have been happy to receive you—but now—the future is a blank. She fell asleep when she learned that you were here. Her father is with her, and the doctor—he would give us no definite promise—septicaemia he fears, and that awful peritonitis . . . wait, I'll go see if you may come." Like a genteel apparition she stole away, leaving Ulick in a doleful mood. Where his philosophy now? Where his calm attitude of a spectator on the sidewalk of life? Vanished all his shallow theories. Confronted by invincible facts his sensual day-dreams shrivelled into nothingness. Only Mona—only that she be spared, he prayed, and prayed for the first time since his boyhood. "O Jésus, sauve-moi! Sans toi je périra!" A scrap of a supplication he had heard his mother utter many times in her tribulations: Mrs. Milton was beckoning from the door. He followed her, treading as lightly as he could. He was chilled with fear.

She lay under a counterpane that was as white as her face. The room was empty, the father and medical man elsewhere. She slept. A large French doll was clasped in her arms. Her heavy hair had been braided and rolled off her forehead. Her features were discom-

posed, her eyelids discoloured. Shocked by the change he saw in her, Ulick knelt at the bedside. Mrs. Milton remained without. Mona's breathing was irregular. She looked ten years older. He hated the grotesque doll with the staring eyes of porcelain. It took up so much space in her bed—in her affection. Her eyes opened.

"Little boy," she tenderly murmured, and stroked his head. He choked his sobs. "Don't worry, poor little boy, we still have our dream-babies." Her face contracted with sudden pain. It was ash-grey, death-like, this sweet face. She held his hand so tightly that it hurt him. She bit the sheet. A low moaning sound issued from her lips, foam-speckled. No longer able to endure the sight of her sufferings he called her mother. Mona made a sign, and he got away, he hardly knew how, hurtling into the two men as he went through the corridor. The doctor paid no attention. Mr. Milton, an old man with a head too large for his body, and with white hair like a grizzled mop, looked keenly at him, and then as if he were solving some intricate chess-problem he paused, ruminated, and finally made up his mind. He conducted the young man who had wrought such havoc in his household to the library, gently pushed him into a chair, offered him whisky and cigars. Ulick shook a negative. He was too much moved to utter a word. If he had opened his mouth it would have been to sob. Apologies, explanations, offers of reparation—all such silly phrase-

ology were forgotten in the rush of repentance. It was the first time that he had come to grips with naked truth, and it hurt like a knife in his entrails. He could only sit with eyes half closed and wait—wait. Facing him was her father, who smoked a pipe. Neither one spoke. The hours slowly went by, every tick of the clock torture-breeding. Tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow!

It was dawn when the groaning of the girl forced itself into his ears, though all doors were closed. The crisis approached. Hurried footsteps were heard and the brittle sound of china. The odours of vinegar, ether and of fumigating pastilles penetrated his nostrils. A solitary scream punctuated the air. Silence followed, profound, enigmatic. Mr. Milton tiptoed to the door and listened. The orders of the doctor had been definite; no one save Mrs. Milton was to be near the sufferer. When Ulick, at last no longer able to sit still, approached the door, the father raised his eyebrows. Not yet! At six o'clock Mrs. Milton appeared. She looked worn and her features were pinched, but she suggested hope. Trembling, Ulick took her hand. She squeezed his. Her husband had left the room.

"The crisis is passed, the doctor tells me. There remains the danger of blood-poisoning. She is weaker than her precious doll. She was delirious for a time and raved over her dream-children. She always loved babies. Poor Mona, what a disappointment hers!"

He rubbed his eyes. Was he in a trance? Such people! Such a father and mother! Not a reproach. He might have been the husband of Mona. Truly they were more than Christian in their charity, in their comprehension; they were angelic—there was no other word to describe them as they really were. He asked if he might see Mona once more. She refused. "Come tonight about nine o'clock. She will surely see you then. I'll tell her you stayed near her all night. Go home, and do try to sleep. Don't worry. Everything, please providence, will come out right." Tears fell as he hurried through the morning streets.

Mona slept, though fitfully, her doll beside her. At intervals she opened her eyes murmuring, "Frustrate, frustrate!" Her mother thought that she was again raving. . . .

III

The green and gold of summer modulated into a gorgeous autumnal symphony of faint-coloured flowers; scarlet, yellow and russet browns. October with its tonic and out-door joys was at hand. The tree-tops beckoned to the white clouds, lazily floating aloft. Ulick longed for the hills of New Hampshire, for the Franconian landscape with its sweep of horizon. One black spot in his memory had not been effaced. In review he saw the fanatics headed by the chief of the

Holy Yowlers, saw Roarin' Nell and Brother Rainbow, saw, Oh! memorable moment, for the first time the glorious woman called Easter, Esther Brandès, now Istar, the famous Isolde and Brunnhilde. Would he ever see her again? Did he really long for her presence, or was it pure fancy, rather, unmitigated curiosity? Over his tea and toast this morning he couldn't reason the idea to a logical conclusion. He knew that he was fickle. But, then, that was in the past. There was only one girl now—Dora being a light-of-love—and that was Mona. She was adorable—Mona, and her parents hardly less adorable. Since that tremendous night he felt that his love for her had been tested as in a fiery furnace; and through that fiery furnace had passed Mona, little the worse for the experience; yet, as he admitted to himself, somehow changed. She was subdued, her eyes unquiet, her vivacity of speech dampened. The wound in her consciousness had left a deep scar. She could not forget. She would never forget.

He sighed as he thought of the change, yet he was reconciled to their altered relationship. Three times a week he dined at the Miltons'. There was no doubt about the cordiality of the old people; they liked him and showed their liking. He was virtually the future son-in-law, and if, at times, he shuddered if he thought of marriage, the sober joy of Mona when he was with them proved a prop to buttress up his irresolution.

Milt had written him a friendly letter in which transpired brotherly pride. It was a certain thing. Ulick accepted the situation. Fatalistic by temperament as well as training, he told himself it might better be Mona than any other girl. She was charming. But she was changed. She spoke no longer of her doll, of their dream-children, and once, when he had invited her to luncheon at the Maison Felicé, offering to play Chopin for her afterwards, she had refused. "I have promised," was her explanation. "You play for me at home, even if our upright isn't so splendid as your Steinway grand, we enjoy you just the same." And when he had mockingly called her a naughty little coward, she responded: "If you don't ask me the reason, perhaps that would be the best way to make me tell everything." He desisted, though he yearned for her. He was not a man to resist his amorous inclinations. Dora was off his visiting list. Mona, then, was his sole refuge. She saw that he was suffering, but she had given her word to her mother that she would never visit Ulick alone. Once only and in company with Mrs. Milton she had taken luncheon at the Maison, but when he asked them to go to his music-room she hastily refused. See that room again she could not. She feared her nerves would play her tricks. For the rest, she had been away several months, in the mountains, at the seashore. Her languor had not been dissipated; "tædium vitæ," the doctor named it. She

needed, he said, an ocean trip, a complete change of scene. But she preferred not to leave Ulick.

He glanced through the news columns this bright October morning. Suddenly a headline and a name caught his eye. Istar! The elopement of the celebrated opera singer Istar with a prince of the blood royal! A half column cable despatch, evidently elaborated in the newspaper office. It described in exaggerated terms the elopement of Easter with a Bavarian princeling from Munich. She had been singing there as "guest" and the musical prince had lost his head, though married to a dowdy princess, and the father of an increasing family. The pair had run away in the night but all the machinery of policedom had been set whirring. En route for Lake Como they were tracked to Vienna and there arrested. A diplomatic arrest, be it understood. The "avenging wife" figured in the dénouement; she was said to have wielded a whip, but Istar grabbed it from her flaccid grasp and gave the unhappy woman a genuine horse-whipping. But doubtless this incident was manufactured out of the whole cloth. The wretched princeling was nipped and, in company with a delegation of solemn functionaries, was sent back to Munich, where he was solemnly spanked and put to bed—metaphorically. The affair made a terrific scandal. Istar was warned by the secret police that she would be expelled if she ever crossed the Bavarian border. What amused Ulick was her re-

ported attitude when she was intercepted. She swaggered to the prince and, shaking his chilly, frightened hand, she insolently hummed a familiar tune: "Du bist verrückt mein Kind. Du must nach Berlin" . . . The pompous entourage couldn't stand that and there were discreet smiles and much wagging of official skulls. Decidedly, Easter came out with flying colours. . . .

Ulick laid down the paper. Easter was surely on the road to victory. Duels, elopements, scandals, royal favours. Good Heavens! how that girl is going straight to her goal. She is an arriviste, but all women are arrivistes. Never mind so you win! When he thought of some women and compared his own slow mode of reacting to circumstances he realized that his incompetence was encyclopædic. He admired Easter more than ever, admired her at a distance of three thousand miles. All said and done she was more to his taste than Mona. He was worldly. He was artistic. He liked the éclat of operatic triumphs. Istar had arrived. Lilli Lehmann, retired; Ternina retired—who was there, except Olive Fremstad to take their place! Fremstad would prove a serious rival to Easter. No doubt about that. But she had visited New York before Easter, and that would give the girl a free field.

There was Mary Garden, who had been startling Paris from its musical apathy with her marvellous Mélisande. And the young Geraldine Farrar—she was

cutting an artistic swath in Berlin. Yet none was so brilliant, he thought, so promising, as his beloved Easter. Beloved? The word was the father to his wish. Easter had never appeared to him in such alluring shapes. Beautiful girl, great singer—and then her sex suddenly swam before him and he literally saw crimson. His enforced chastity was telling adversely on his sanguine temperament. Be virtuous and you'll be bilious! He sourly quoted himself. If this thing keeps on I'll be forced to ring up Dora. . . . He hurriedly dressed and went to his club.

IV

A red touring-car, latest model, stopped before Madame Ash's house. A tall woman alighted and rang the bell. Eloise answered and could only gasp: "Miss Easter! Madame will be so surprised." Easter grasped the faithful girl's hand and shook it in man-like fashion. Her democratic ways were not the least of her endearing qualities. A pupil was singing, but Easter strode in and heartily kissing her teacher she exclaimed: "You darling, how glad I'm to see you!" Madame Ash, who couldn't be startled by an earthquake, was nevertheless surprised. "You, Easter! And what are you going to do in New York?"

"I'm going to raise hell!" she crisply announced. Madame nodded approvingly. "You will, no doubt

about that, and no doubt as to your nationality—you're Yankee all right." She dismissed her pupil and ordered tea in the drawing-room. Such visitors did not come every day. She found Easter handsomer, more self-possessed, also more imperious in her manner. The girl had become woman. Her beauty positively dazzled. It was her health that contributed to this initial impression. Madame Ash interrogated her as to her lessons. With the accustomed forgetfulness of youthful prima-donnas Easter waved away the subject: nor would she sing. "Wait! You will soon have a chance to judge in public." Then she exploded her bombshell. "I open the season at the Metropolitan. Think of it, dear Madame Frida, I'll sing Isolde to Jean's Tristan." That was another surprise. And not a line in the newspapers. Why hadn't Alfred told her? "Because he doesn't know," answered Easter. "Not a soul knows. I dodged the reporters this morning. Paul—Mr. Godard—you remember him!—What a friend he has been to me—that scrape at Munich, I mean—He took me down to Italy and I'm glad it was Paul and not that little fiddling Prince Ludwig—well, Frida, I've seen some life—I must be going. Tell Alfred to come to the Waldorf. I'm there for a day or two. And tell him the contract was made by cable. It's the fault of the management if he wasn't informed. It will be in the papers tomorrow morning. Go to the window and look at my new car—nice present, isn't it!

It came to the dock to meet us." She stopped for breath.

"So Mister Paul came across with you, did he?"

"The regulation trio," laughed Easter. "A maid, a poodle, a lover. The inevitable . . ." Madame saw her get into the car, and fancied she also saw a man. Waving her hand Easter disappeared. "Ca y est!" said Madame. The lesson was resumed. Do, re, mi, fa, sol, la si, do!

When Easter rushed into his music-room, followed by Madame Felicé, the legs of Ulick trembled. It was more than a surprise, it was a shock in the nature of hallucination. He took her in his arms and tenderly kissed her, ejaculating: "Easter, Easter, it can't be you! It's a dream!" She, too, was affected; she returned his kisses, and with more fervour. "Good old Jewel. I've come back to you, haven't I, Madame?" But Madame had vanished, no doubt wondering over the versatility of young Americans. She had not forgotten Mona. But she was fond of Easter, and admired her, particularly after her newspaper notoriety.

The chums had a thousand things to say. Ulick did not disguise his affection. He hugged her till she broke away, advising prudence. "The same crazy Jewel," she said, as she tidied her hair. He was disappointed. Were they never to begin again? he asked. "Surely," she answered, and mischievously added: "If we ever really began." Another scene ensued. He pur-

sued her from the bedroom to the bathroom, and back again into the music-room. There she stopped and seizing him by the wrists with a grip of a giantess—he carried black and blue marks for a week—she bade him stop his nonsense. Some other day! Besides, she hadn't come to see him for such things. "Why," she blurted out with her accustomed brutal frankness, "why, I believe you are overtrained, Jewel. Have you been saving up for me during these years?" Ulick was confused. "A little bird wrote me that there were two girls while I was away, quoi donc, mon cher!" (Damn Alfred! thought Ulick.) "But I must be going. Doesn't Alfred dine here any more? I want to see him badly. He must look after me the night of my début."

"The night of your début?" "Yes, didn't I tell you? I sing Isolde the first night next month at the Metropolitan." Ulick's eyes opened wide. "Does Alfred know the news?" "No, and I fancy he will be wrathy. I can't help it. The offer came. It was so big that I chucked Berlin, Paris, London and took the first steamer leaving Genoa. Paul said—" "Paul?" . . .

"Why not? Paul—he came over with us. He has been a true friend. He's waiting outside now in my car." "He's waiting outside now," echoed the dazed young man. "Don't be stupid, Jewel. He and Allie are together, otherwise I shouldn't have stayed so long with you." "Oh! Allie, too," he sarcastically observed. "Yes, Allie Wentworth, too. That girl helped me over

some rough places in Europe. I shall never give her up, never," Easter reiterated with passion. "Was she the cause of the duel?" "Honestly, Jewel, living in this provincial town has made you lose your Parisian wits. There was no duel. That story was pure blague. I had a fencing match with Mary Garden and a reporter from the 'Figaro' was there. I filled him full of prunes —that's all." She laughed with the robust ventral laughter of a country girl. She was the same old Easter, and Ulick adored her for her natural manner.

But he pretended that he did not understand. "What did you and Mary row about?" "Oh! Debussy. She thinks him so extraordinary. I don't. No climax, all pretty nuance, not a virile bar in him. A composer who fell asleep and dreamed of Tristan. But after Wagner he is like absinthe after brandy. I like the big, passionate style. I like Rodin. I adore D'Annunzio. Debussy is for artistic capons, and other fearful fowl. But Mary is wonderful. I envy her all the same. I love sumptuous characters. That's why I like to read Mlle. de Maupin and also about that perverse puss, Satin, in Nana. She reminds me of Allie, and her pranks—simply adorable, I tell you. Toujours fidèle. But great God, look at the hour! Good-bye, for the present, Jewel! No, don't come to the door: I'll have a hard enough time explaining to those people—they hate each other as do cats and dogs. Don't forget your old sweetheart, Jewel," and she patted his cheek as if

he were a schoolboy. He could have killed her. She fled the apartment. But she hadn't said a word about the Munich elopement or the royal lover.

V

Alfred exploded some nasty phrase when he heard of Easter's début. Close as he was to the Opera direction not a word had been hinted. As a newspaper man he revolted. He wanted the "scoop" for the "Clarion." No one got it; the news was ladled out to all, a regular soup-kitchen affair. He determined to get even with someone, with Easter herself. He had lost heavily that afternoon on the races, and it demanded all Madame Ash's tact to smooth his outraged vanity and feathers. But she did it. She promised to sit beside him that first night. Perhaps Easter wouldn't carry off everything with such a high hand as in Germany . . . and there was always Jean de Reszke, not to drag in Edouard, who must be counted . . . except Lilli, what Isolde had ever divided the interest of the audience? Jean was peerless. Poor Easter had a rocky road ahead. . . . Alfred's eyes glistened with malice. . . .

The Great White Way, pleasure-ground of America, is the incandescent oven of the metropolis. Under its fierce glare all felines appear alike. But grey, never. Alfred, who had lived in Europe, noted that the sad-coloured procession that slowly moves around Picca-

dilly Circus, the merry crush of the Friedrichstrasse, and the gayer swirl of the Grand Boulevard, was not so cosmopolitan as Broadway's army. Every nationality helps to swell the stream of petticoats. Lo! this is the City of Dis, he thought, when he saw the maelstrom of faces pass him; faces blanched by regret, sunned by crime, beaming with sin; faces rusted by vain virtue, weary faces, and the triumphant regard of them that are loved. The eyes, the eyes! The city had begun its nocturnal carnival as he went down to the Opera House, and like all organized orgies the spectacle was of a consuming melancholy. No need for him to moralize; cause and effect spoke with an appalling clarity. If Matthew Arnold had been there he would have called Gotham, not Lutetia, the spot where is most worshipped the Great Goddess of Lubricity. Through this volcano of noise, a sinister medley of farce and flame, the Will-to-Enjoy wound like a river of red-hot lava. The day-birds are gone to bed; night-fowl are afield. The owl is a denizen of the dark, yet Minerva's wisdom is not to be found. Even the cats are bathed in the blaze of publicity. Alfred reached the Metropolitan. . .

All operatic triumphs resemble each other; it is the failures that differ. The début of Istar—how that exotic name did boldly stand on the bill-boards!—was like the début of the pre-elected. From the rising of the curtain when she hurls her angry disdainful:

"Wer wagt mich zu höhnen?" her success was assured. In the first entr'acte Madame Ash said to Alfred: "That settles it." He didn't quite agree with her. He went to Easter's dressing-room. He was not admitted. It looked as if she intended to burn behind her all her boats and bridges; but a few words from Jean, always considerate to débutantes, confirmed Madame Ash's judgment. At the dress-rehearsal Easter had been rotten. That, averred Jean, was sure sign of success. And it was a brilliant success. This audacious American girl came, sang, conquered. She actually divided honors with Tristan. After the last curtain she received an unmistakable personal call. It was for her alone and Jean graciously left the field free. As cool as usual she made a little speech.

"Thank you, dear people. Thank you for your indulgence. It is my début in my beloved land. I am an American-born girl. My first teacher, and my best, was my mother . . ." The audience received this filial sentiment with overwhelming applause. "Does that young lady know the ropes?" ironically inquired Alfred. "Mother first and best teacher!—that's the stuff to put over for the sentimental imbeciles. And isn't she grateful? Not a word about you—not a word about Lilli or Cosima—that girl has won out in a walk," he added. As they pushed through the buzzing throng—Max Hirsh told them that the gate-money was bigger than at any other opening night for sea-

sons—they heard nothing but praise. It was Istar here, Istar there, everywhere Istar! The sound of the exotic name seemed to hypnotize the mob. Madame Ash smiled:

"Are you green enough to expect gratitude from a singer? I think the 'mother' allusion was a masterstroke. Esther is a genius."

VI

Happy singers, like happy nations, have no history. Easter was a happy singer, but she had plenty of histories, though they would never be engraved on deathless tablets. Volition being her strongest asset, and pleasure-loving her weakness, she spent her nights singing, her days trifling. She called it happiness, a reaction from the passionate tension of interpreting Isolde, Brunnhilde, Kundry, Norma for the delight of huge audiences. The morning saw her briskly walking through the park. Her apartment was on Central Park West, near 72nd Street. Her robust physique daily demanded many cubic feet of fresh air. In the afternoon she rode about in her car; there now were two at her service, one, an electric brougham for the city visits, the shops. She was fairly prudent in diet, though she drank too much champagne, smoked too many cigarettes. Punctual at rehearsals, she was out of bed earlier on those days. So the opera didn't interfere with

hygiene. An admirable artiste, and with the moral sense to be observed in a barnyard.

Paul was the present incumbent in her House of Life. His wealth, social position, above all, his amiable personality, fitted her like a glove. Easter disliked broils or bother. After the tragic happenings of her nightly work, the very sight of a lover pulling a long face, exasperated her. Ulick drove her into fits of rage with his importunings, his complaints that she wasn't treating him on the level. "Very well," she would retort, " I am not. What are you going to do about it? You know what Paul is, and what I think of him. I'm fond of you, Jewel, but Paul pleases me more. He has tact. He lets me alone. I'm quite sure if he had been mixed up in that horrid mess up in New Hampshire—where was it anyhow?—he wouldn't consider it any claim on me. I don't. But you do—yes, you do, Ulick Invern. You seem to think that you are a sort of a guardian, a lover, perhaps a husband"—she laughed. The idea of a husband having any authority over her tickled her rib risible. Ulick gloomed. What could he say or do in face of such barbed-wire opposition? The only thing he achieved was to neglect, and grossly, Mona Milton. He discontinued his visits, if not altogether, at least spaced them at wide intervals. Mona did not complain. Occasionally she went to luncheon with him at Martin's. The opera and Easter tempted her curiosity. At first the sheer vitality of the glorious

singing woman repelled her, but she, too, was eventually trapped. The first act of Tristan and the swan song of Isolde stirred her very entrails. It was conceded, however, by the cognoscenti that Istar's second act lacked the exquisite tenderness of Olive Fremstad —she had arrived—whose Sieglinde was a masterly exposition of the pitiful, charming woodland creature. But in the Immolation Scene of the Twilight of the Gods Istar trod dramatic heights. That chronic faultfinder, Alfred Stone, confessed that since Lilli Lehmann and Milka Ternina, no one had so touched him. Materna and the earlier Wagnerian singers were only bawlers in comparison. But Istar—!

When he heard from her lips the terms that she had imposed on the management without singing a note in advance, he threw up his hands. "In the heart of every prima-donna there is a pawnbroker," he asserted, and the mot rapidly gained currency. Easter only smiled. She liked Alfred. He was the first man who had been kind to her in the big city that depressing night of her arrival. And he had stood by her at the première; to be sure, he couldn't have done anything else without stultifying his critical powers. She was not ungrateful, but that was a secret. Her triumph had been authentic. No preliminary blasts of advertising trumpets. Philip Hale, who came over from Boston for the event, had summed up the situation when wiring to his newspaper, "When Istar sings she is her own passionate

press-agent." Edgar Saltus compressed it in an epigram: "Istar may be a Daughter of Sin, but she has no vocal vices." It was all true.

For Mona the singer presently became an obsession. She concealed her feelings concerning the palpable defection of Ulick. She was as cordial as ever in her conduct toward him, but she no longer spoke of their dream-children. Grane and Shamus had died the swift death of all poetic conceptions confronted by harsh reality. Her love for him seemed diverted to Easter. As the lustre of an electric lamp attracts the night-moth so the glittering personality and fame of the prima-donna drew within its warm zone the feebler will of Mona. The two girls became close companions. With growing disquietude Ulick noticed this; but he was powerless. He had kept to himself his early adventure with Easter. And Easter had never heard from him a hint of his relations with Mona. Yet he was certain that if she didn't precisely know the facts she surmised them. She would fix her brilliant eyes on the girl and Mona, blushing, would hang her head. How much did Easter know? How much had Alfred told her? He was a gossip, a tattler of mean tales, an amateur in the art of scandalous insinuation. Nevertheless, the others were pleased when he appeared. He saw more clearly than any of them, and he had the disagreeable gift of telling truths. It was a wonder he maintained his unpopularity.

. . . One sunny afternoon in midwinter they went to the old Vienna Café next to Grace Church to drink coffee and chatter about eternity and the town-pump. It was Alfred's beloved stamping-ground. The white suavities of Grace Church, the twist of the street where Broadway debouches into Union Square, aroused in him the fancy that in no other spot of the planet is the tempo of living faster, or any place where the human pulse beats more quickly. The tumults and alarums of the day are more exciting than a Cycle in Cathay. Vitality is at its hottest. We are like a colony of ants disturbed by a stranger, he ruminated. We are caught in eddies and whirlpools; and on the edges of foaming breakers we are dumped upon densely populated sands. Childe Roland, if he came to New York, would not be heard, so many other knights are blowing their horns; besides, he might be puzzled to find his eagerly sought-for Dark Tower. Our surfaces are hard, boastful, the rhythms of our daily life abrupt, overemphatic. There are few timid backwaters left for sensitive folk who dislike the glare and rumble of modern traffic. We appear to be making some unknown goal, as in the streets we seem to be running to a fire or a fight that we never reach. Alternately hypnotic and repellent, New York is often a more stony-hearted stepmother than the Oxford street of De Quincey. Alfred admitted to himself that our city would not be considered beautiful in the old order of æsthetics. Its

specific beauty savours of the monstrous. The scale is epical. Too many buildings are glorified chimneys. But what a picture of titanic energy, of cyclopean ambition! Look over Manhattan from Washington Heights. The wilderness of flat roofs in London; the winning profile of Paris; the fascination of Rome as viewed from Trinità dei Monti; of Buda from across the Danube at Pest—those are not more startlingly dramatic than New York, especially when the chambers of the west are filled with the tremendous opal of a dying day, or when the lyric moonrise paves a path of silver across the hospitable sea we call our harbour. With all his ingrained hostility to America and things American (he despised the uncouth Bartholdi statue as an emblem of liberty, saying that its torch was in reality a threatening club: "Get to work," it commanded) he was forced to aknowledge the supremacy of New York. Two European cities only were more dramatic; Toledo, Prague. And during a summer sunrise the reverberations of our parent-planet, of that blazing white disk which made the sky a metallic blue, evokes Africa, rather than Italy; Enfin—the true firmament of North America.

Easter and Mona, escorted by Paul and Ulick, entered. They were in high spirits. They surrounded Alfred, forcing him to drop his newspaper. The habitués were sipping coffee and playing chess. Some were celebrities. Alfred named them. One and all they

stared at the singer. Several came over to the table and paid their way with extravagant compliments. She took all without a trace of the pose of the pampered prima-donna. It was her due. It was also in the day's work. When the others had gone, the party fell to arguing. A chance word of Ulick's had sent Easter up into the air. What! if women were such cowardly cows, the slaves of their husbands, and their dressmakers, the dupes of their lovers and children, was that sufficient reason why a level-headed woman should follow the call of these sheep! A woman should listen to her inward promptings. Easter said she didn't propose to be a shop-girl trying to live on the wage doled her by some self-advertising philanthropists—she gave a list that jarred Alfred's cynicism—those humbugs who drove thousands of girls into the ranks of prostitutes. Supposing, she continued, I had no voice, only my looks, what then! The stage, of course. What matters envious backbiting. A nun immured doesn't escape calumny. Hamlet knew. A girl who had an ounce of beauty or brains, practical brains, not moonshine rhapsody, can always make her way. Marry, forsooth! And beget a lot of brats for some cheap clerk, who stints her expenses! Pooh! Short-lived as is the good time of a cocotte despite her inevitable chance of poverty and disease, isn't her existence in a show-down about as useful, or as useless? That depends on the angle of moral incidence—or the chill, grey life of a servant, a

factory worker, or the wife of a workman, with the horrors of frequent child-bearing, the hideous drunkenness, abuse and grinding poverty? Many a girl has remained virtuous because she was too plain to be tempted.

"You sweet duckling!" she exclaimed turning to Mona and embracing her energetically, "what will you ever know of the submerged lives about you? You were reared in cotton-wool and have been spared the sight of such agonizing." Mona shivered, and timidly returned the embrace. The three young men exchanged glances. Suddenly Easter took a new tack. "Jewel," she said meditatively regarding him, "Jewel, why don't you write a novel?" "Good heavens, old girl, I have hardly the energy to pencil my allotted newspaper paragraphs. Novels nowadays mean either the naked truth and that spells disaster, or slimy sensual sentimentality. Your heroine, to make an impression, must resist seduction, though longing for carnal satisfaction; or, if she happens to be a professional prostitute—led from the sloppy paths of a still sloppier virtue when very young—then she must be converted in the limelight to the sound of pharisaical trumpets. The chief thing is to combine voluptuous description with hypocritical repentance. To dissect the sex emotions calmly is the one unforgivable offence. Foam at the mouth, you may, in presenting the details of nymphomania or satyriasis, if you only piously turn

up your eyes at the close. Sex is as sane, as clean as any other physical function; in fact, it's cleaner. Eating, drinking, and digestion are not particularly attractive. Fornication, conception, child-bearing are natural. Treat them naturally. Don't slop over them. Don't tell about blasted lives, blackened souls, because your heroine assumes a horizontal attitude and sees the moon over the shoulder of her lover. Don't gasbag about sin, when the sexual act is no more sinful than eating. Good God! how long are the emasculated ideals of ancient Asiatic fanatics to check the free exercise of a woman's nature? Calling a natural process like copulation a sin doesn't make it so. I am a feminist, as you girls know, but I don't give a rap for the suffrage if it doesn't free woman from her sexual slavery. If a man can run around, having a good time, and not be reproached with his loose-living, why, by the same token, can't a woman?" He was unusually animated.

"Bravo, Ulick!" cried Easter. Mona shivered again. She knew. Paul giggled; when in doubt he always giggled, but he was thoroughly shocked by Ulick's banal defence of immorality. Alfred shook his head; he, too, knew the mainspring of this verbiage. "Ulick, my lad, you write your novels in the air. You will never publish one. You are 'veule' as they say in your beloved language and 'veule' means something more than soft or weak. The truth is—" "Alfred and his truths," sniffed Easter—" is, Ulick, you are rotten, mor-

ally rotten. Even your not drinking or smoking is only cowardice. Back to the boulevards for you!

"Besides," pursued Alfred, thoroughly aroused, "isn't it time to give literature a breathing-spell from this infernal sex-humbuggery? Today everything is referred to sex, from religion to dreams. Childhood is trapped by psychiatrists searching for sex-documents. And, then, doesn't all this interest in a woman's chastity sicken you? It makes me think that men are still Turks buying female flesh by weight. It's simply disgusting, that's what it is. Why not her liver or her lungs! I'd as soon ask if a woman were constipated as ask if she were chaste. The world is hag-ridden by sexuality. And the worst of it is that with their 'new freedom,' as they call it, women are becoming more polyandrous. They, too, needs must have a staff of males for their individuality! Music is to blame a lot, Wagner's music in particular. What else is Tristan and Isolde but a tonal orgasm? Think of the Prelude—never mind the love-music in Act II. That is avowedly voluptuous, as it should be—but just see with what savant art Wagner has built up from the sighing, yearning bars at the opening of the Prelude a perfect chart, dynamic, emotional, evoking physical images; then developing a crescendo without parallel in music the climax subsiding into melancholy close like two felines caterwauling on a back fence. Musical erethism, I tell you. . . ."

Easter's eyes snapped. "Disgusting, Alfred. I fancy you prefer the parsiphallic repulse of Kundry, when Wagner had become antinatural, denying womanhood, thanks to his epicene patron, crazy King Ludwig of Bavaria." Alfred sniggered. Ulick never moved a muscle. It was vieux jeu, this lecturing from Alfred; at least it didn't stir him to the depths as did the burning phrase of Milt. "I'd like to meet your brother, Mona, if he is anything like you." "He isn't, Istar," she replied, "he has a beautiful nature, pure as the stars." "Listen to her. You might suppose, Mona, that you were leading, or had led—" Easter significantly paused—"a wicked life. You fast! Oh! As for your beautiful souls! Pooh! Men are all alike! Beasts! The soutane checks, no doubt; but I shouldn't like to tempt your brother too far." She became reflective. The men were uneasy. Where was all this vain talk leading to? Easter exploded another little bombshell. "I repeat, I'd like to meet your brother some time, Mona." The other girl nodded. "What's become of that Dora Paul used to rave over, or was it you, Jewel?" "Oh, by Jove, I say," remonstrated Paul. "For God's sake, if we are going to discuss brothels I'm off," said Alfred, and he left in a huff. The party broke up.

Easter often went to concerts with Ulick. One afternoon, after a performance of Vincent D'Indy's masterpiece, Istar, she told Ulick that these Symphonic Variations had given her the cue for her operatic name.

Istar wasn't so different from Easter. Maliciously Ulick pointed out the seventh variation called in the critical notes The Seventh Gate. She read:

"At the seventh gate, the warder stripped her; he took off the last veil that covers her body". . .

"You reversed the order of disrobing with me, didn't you, Easter?" She regarded him as if from her tallest tower of disdain and frigidly answered: "Don't be too sure, Jewel. Not even of the Holy Yowlers romance at Zaneburg." He was infuriated. What did she mean? And how well she remembered names, when she wished to. What next—?

VII

There are limitations to the endurance of an unvirtuous man. Ulick, who had forsworn further advances toward Mona, began his aimless cruising about town in pursuit of complaisant women. He found plenty, yet he remained unsatisfied; mercenary love repelled him. The cocottes of the metropolis were mournful substitutes after the light-hearted irresponsible "filles de joie" of Paris. In that City of Light prostitution is elevated to the dignity of Fine Art. He began thinking of Dora, dear little vulgar Dora; vulgar, but also delicious Dora. Her body was like a white satin stove. Doubtless there had been many applications to fill the niche occupied by Paul; doubtless, too, she had put him out

of her memory as one of her sheep that had strayed from the fold. The pathos of passion operating, he saw an idealized Dora; Dora the sweet accomplice in the eternal chess-play of sex; a Dora, voluptuous, yet a house-wife, cook and concubine; but always a Dora that interested with her vivacity, her spurts of wit—original, vile, yet mirth-breeding. Should he, or should he not, phone or write her? He decided that a call would settle the weighty question. For him it was weighty. Woman was not only a diversion, but also a necessity. He liked their propinquity. He could never, he felt sure, conceive himself as Dora's husband. In the rôle of an agreeable mistress—! Ah! that was another phase.

So he leisurely walked, one afternoon, to the apartment-house on upper Lexington Avenue, and soon was pressing the button at her door. He was relieved to find that her name was still there. Migratory birds, these, and she was as restless as her colleagues. After a brief delay, he heard light, hurried footsteps. It was the maid, another coloured girl. She bade him enter and he sent his name to her mistress. A moment later he was ushered into the dining-room, where he found Dora playing cards with an anonymous female who had evidently been drinking. There was a decanter and carafe on the buffet. Dora hardly looked up, but her greeting was cordial enough. "My old man, Lily, this is Jewel, my best lady friend, Lily. Sit down, dearie,

and hold your horses till we spiel out this hand. I'm in luck, look! Did you ever see such a bunch of cards?" Ulick preserved his patience; he had hoped to find Dora alone. In default of that he made the best of the situation. Finished and victorious, Dora bounded to his knees, addressing him by all the pet names she knew. Her warm, odorous presence—though whisky was one of its components—soothed his irritated vanity. Easter treated him as if he were a eunuch; Dora, as a man should be. He did not understand his virile prowess. It was recognized in the Tenderloin district and more than one nightbird had envied Dora the possession of her handsome, athletic young man. She now appeared to be glad of his return. She chirped:

"You bad boy! What naughty girl kept you away from me? That singer, I suppose. Or was it the meek-as-Moses girl! There, there, I shan't begin all over again. I lost my head, and you did yours. Honest to God, Jewel, you hadn't ought to struck Paul. He is a dead-game sport and a friend of yours. Shall we take a ride and a dinner at the Casino? Well, I guess yes. Lily, put on your glad-rags. My old man is going to blow us off to a fine time." Ulick looked his discontent, and Lily diplomatically refused, giving as a reason an engagement with her Fred. Dora passed over her defection. She rushed into the kitchen and gave instructions to the slavey—a damfool, she informed the company; then she dressed herself, and that function

occupied precisely one hour. Ulick fumed. Lily helped herself at rhythmic intervals from the decanter, prefacing each drink with: "You will pardon me!" Ulick politely replied and wished her in Sheol. Finally they got afloat, and that night he slept from home.

He temporarily disappeared. Mona noted his absence but as she burned her own smoke, her parents made no comment on the tepid attentions of her fiancé. They recognized her fortitude in adverse circumstances, and they preferred to remain neutral. Mona was apathetic, they knew, nevertheless they feared to arouse her wrath by criticizing the reprehensible behaviour of Ulick. But Easter was different. After several weeks' absence she went down to luncheon at Madame Felicé's. No Ulick. Nor had he been home for nights and nights, she was confidently informed by Madame. Yes, he had been in at dinner, once; that was last week. He had Dora as company. Madame was a philosopher in petticoats and one girl valued another. She was extremely fond of her ci-devant lodger, the illustrious Istar. But Easter was annoyed. She alone boasted the privilege of broken engagements; Paul or Ulick were mere pawns to be pushed about at her will. She asked Madame if she knew the address of Dora. "I have her telephone number and from that we can surely get the house address from Central." She did this. Dora lived at "The Sappho" on Lexington Avenue. Easter booked the number and thanked Madame,

who, naturally curious, queried: "Easter, chérie, I hope you won't go there. Dora is charming, mai c'est une cocotte." "It's not the charming Dora I'm after," was the response. "I'll catch Master Ulick on the wire some morning, and that's my little game. He can't play fast and loose with me as he does with that sweet, unhappy Mona. I'm not built that way. With me it's Either—Or! as they say in some Ibsen play." Madame Felicé lifted eyebrows and smiled—inscrutably.

VIII

As Easter rode to the door, another car drove down Lexington Avenue. Dora didn't see her visitor, but Ulick did, and he whispered into the ear of his chauffeur. The machine flew. Easter not wasting a moment didn't leave her car. She saw the couple, and she bade her driver follow. A long stern chase ensued. The two cars kept equal distance all the way down town. Policemen whistled. People stared. Timid ladies expostulated. Furiously Easter's car pursued the other. At Eighteenth Street Ulick told his man to turn westward, to Fourth Avenue, thence to the old Everett House on Union Square. There was no sight of Easter. At Gramercy Park Ulick had outmanœuvred Easter, taking the short cut into Irving Place, while Easter seeing her prey escape had no doubt directed her car to Fourth Avenue by way of Twentieth Street. Ulick in-

wardly exulted. He had dodged Easter, and he was sure that she was jealous of him, else how account for this wild, whirling chase! Oblivious, Dora wondered at the speed and the growing excitement of her beau—so she called him. He's a sport, after all, she said. The car stopped in front of the hotel, but, alas, as it did, Easter's motor came into view around the corner of the Avenue. So timed was the arrest of the two cars that the chauffeurs grinned, believing the meeting had been arranged.

Ulick bundled Dora into the hotel, calling to the man to go to Broadway ferry, east Fourteenth Street; then he fairly pushed Dora through the lobbies, the café, through the Fourth Avenue door, and the girl, scared by his determined face, didn't question him. When they reached Eighteenth Street he hurried her along to Third Avenue and there he relaxed. "They were after us, Dora." "Who was?" "The police." "My Gawd, the police!" "Plain-clothes men," he sententiously explained, and the frightened girl almost collapsed. The police! The House of Correction, or some horrible Magdalen Home? Ulick seeing that she was suffering cooked up a lie. He had been sued—or was it contempt of court?—at any rate, he had detectives on his trail. No necessity to be troubled over the incident. He, alone, was involved. Reassured, she clung to his arm. They arrived at Fourteenth Street. There they took an east-bound car. At the ferry house the motor

was awaiting them. Ulick drew the chauffeur aside, gave him a tip and asked what had become of the other car. It still stood before the hotel, he supposed. The big lady in it had leaped out before it stopped and made a dash after them. But as luck would have it a young gentleman detained her and she was as mad as hops. But he wouldn't let go her wrists. "What sort of looking young gentleman was it?" Ulick asked. "Oh, clean-shaved like you, sir, and he wore loud checks in his clothes. He laughed a lot, too, especially when he saw that the lady was getting madder and madder." Phew! She had a temper, that beauty! Ulick told him to drive to Manhattan Beach. It must have been Paul, he fancied.

After midnight they returned. The sea-air had refreshed them. The dinner at Jack's had been excellent, and the roof-garden prime-chop. Dora was drowsy. Dora was affectionate. Her beloved Jewel was beside her once more and she didn't care if she did attract attention by almost sitting in his lap. Some of her "lady-friends," those sweet girl-graduates from the University of Sin, "whose feet took hold on hell," had aroused in her a half-drunken quarrelsome spirit when they flirted with her "fellow" at the show. But she had him now, he couldn't be taken from her by any woman alive. She opened the door after some preliminary fumbling with the key. They entered. Her French poodle, which usually barked with joy when-

ever she came home, did not lift up its voice. Dora was frightened. Dodo was ill, perhaps stolen—and O my Gawd! there's a light in the living-room. Burglars, Jewel, let's go for the police. But Ulick thought otherwise. Burglars don't smoke cigarettes when cracking a crib. It must be Paul. He made a wry face. He called, "Paulchen, is that you?" "No, it's Istarchen," came the answer, in a resonant voice. By all the infernal gods—Easter!

"Well," screamed Dora, "this is a surprise. Where did you blow in from? And how in the world did you break in? Them hall-boys hasn't keys." She was drunk enough to be familiar. She knew Easter only by sight, but whisky bridged the gulf; in her sober senses she would have been too cowed by Easter's magnificent presence to have addressed her thus. Easter, smoking a cigarette, lay outstretched on a divan. She smiled in a friendly manner at Dora, and pulled her down beside her. To Ulick she addressed no word. She gazed at him, and sneered. Dora was in the seventh heaven of pride. She, poor little prostitute, one of the despised and rejected, living on the lusts of men, was treated not only as a human but as a social equal by the greatest living lady opera-singer! She embraced her, and besought her to drink. Easter thanked her, adding "I've already helped myself." She again challenged Ulick with her hard glance. He fell into a chair and held his peace. The two women drank a toast to "happy days

and better acquaintance" and Dora, now half-seas over, supplemented it with the classic toast of "professional ladies" and kept-women. Easter laughed uproariously. Her descent into this moral sewer pleased her. Ulick was disgusted. Emboldened by her success Dora persuaded Easter to go with her into the dressing-room, from which, much later, they emerged wearing night draperies. A queer go, this sudden intimacy, ruminated the young man.

The women were in high spirits, and high-balls were absorbed. Ulick saw that Dora was hopeless. The problem was how to get rid of Easter. Her car had been dismissed; no doubt about that. Curiously he asked: "But, Easter, how did you get in here?" She turned to Dora, now on the divan, her drunken eyes admiringly blinking at the singer. "Dora, dear, where there's a will there's a way. After I lost you this afternoon at the Everett House"—"Lost me at the Everett?" gasped Dora. "It's a new one on me." She turned to Ulick and fairly snarled. "So that was your game, was it, to go hell-splitting through the town and get rid of my darling friend?" she wept. "You nearly broke my neck, d'ye know it, you herring-gut! Oh! I ain't got any use for a young chap who doesn't drink or smoke. He's sure to be up to something worse. He'll bear watching, so he will!" Easter triumphantly soothed the hysterical girl. They went into the kitchen. Soon a Welsh rabbit was on the table. Easter also possessed

culinary technique. Impassioned by her superior prowess, Dora watched her with ravished vision. They drank again. The younger girl became frolicsome. She pulled Ulick's hair. She tickled him. She kissed and hugged Easter as if she were carried away by her friendship. Easter enjoyed the sport. They dragged the unresisting Ulick into the bed-room and assaulted him with pillows. They rolled him on the bed. Dora unbuttoned his vest. Then they tumbled over him, tantalizing him with their pranks. He saw that they were nude beneath their house-wrappers. Abandoning themselves the half-crazy pair would stretch on the sheets and then draw up their legs in unison, while the harassed Ulick viewed with longing their beautiful figures; Dora, slender, blonde, resilient; Easter, brunette, massive, but supple as a snake. He suffered. With shrieks they teased, tempted, evaded him.

Tiring, the trio returned to the dining-room. More whisky. Quite overcome, Dora lolled on the couch. She held Easter closely clutched. Ulick hinted that she had better go to bed. That aroused her. "Yes, but not with you . . . my boy." And she returned to Easter. "Go on about your business," she suddenly shrieked. "I hate you. I hate all men. You only want to use me." And then she fell to sobbing. Easter motioned toward the door with her head. "I think you had better go," she calmly counselled. "Dora is overwrought, hysterical, and doesn't know what she is saying or doing."

He fetched his hat. "That's true," he answered. "Dora doesn't know what she is doing, but you do, Easter." She gave him a nasty look, in which were mingled amusement and contempt. Too polite to pelt her with the invectives he felt she deserved, he contented himself with saying as he opened the door: "Yes, Easter, I think I had better go; go back to Paris. It can't be any viler there than here." Jeering laughter followed him to the lift.

IX

"You look blue about the gills, Ulick," said Milt in his heartiest manner. "You're not well these days, are you? What's the trouble?"

"I'm dizzy most of the time. No, it's not the stomach, it's something worse. You know I didn't get a clean bill of health from my father's side of the house. Of late, my left side goes numb for days at a time—partial paralysis or, at least, its prodromes." Ulick seemed out of sorts. His face was earth-coloured. He had been going the pace and consequently suffering. Milt stood over him and harangued:

"Come! Ulick, my boy. You've got to stop your ways of living else land in a hospital, or worse—perhaps in a mad-house, for the epileptic spasm you call love. You are bartering your birthright of soul and body. Now listen! Here is a fair proposition. There is to be a retreat for men at our college, men like you,

weary of the world, men who have the honesty to repeat your favourite Baudelaire's prayer: 'O! Lord God! Give me the force and courage to contemplate my heart and my body without disgust.' Admirable humility, for where you end Christianity begins. Yours is not an exceptional case. The whole world is morally out of joint. It is become godless, and were it not for the saving remnant, God in His just wrath would destroy the earth as he destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah. But He leaves the wicked to their own devices. A catastrophe will surely come to Europe, perhaps Asia and America, a catastrophe that beggars the imagination in the contemplation thereof. Satan will be released from his fiery pit and Antichrist will rule the nations. Presumptuous man has tried to regulate the mighty diapason of the spheres with his pitiful tuning-fork and lo! he has miserably failed. Woe, woe, I say to souls unprepared—" Ulick interrupted.

"Honestly, Milt, I don't mean to be rude, but you ought to charge admission. Hire a hall. You are a born missionary. I mean it."

"Don't mock, Ulick. Reality is stranger than rhetoric. You are at the crossroads. Decide at once. My college, as you know, is up-country. A week's retreat will, therefore, be hygiene for body as well as soul. And after the retreat there is to be a Novena of the Blessed Virgin. Be with us, dear brother! You will bathe in the lustral waters and become cleansed. Born anew

everything will work out for the best. Your bohemian life is your undoing. You look like a man with spinal trouble. Pardon me, is it so!" Ulick shook his head but his knees shook too. Marry Mona! There it is at last! Not a hint but a veiled command. Of course, he would marry the girl. Marriage was the only way for an honourable man.

"I've nothing seriously the matter with me, Milt, I've inherited bad blood from my father. Mona needn't fear. I shan't taint her. But I'm in no physical or mental condition to marry at present. Give me time to recuperate my forces. I've been going it hard for the past years. Paris couldn't be worse than New York." Milt was gloomy.

"Keep away from Dora, and that other enchantress, Istar. The pair of them would kill Casanova," Milt sullenly replied.

"I've not seen them since the night they threw me out at Dora's." Milt was curious. Ulick told the story; how Easter contrived to get into Dora's apartment. She went boldly to the top floor, rang the bell of Dora's neighbour, also a pretty lady, and told a fib. Could she be permitted to go to Dora's room by way of the balcony? The little woman paled at the proposition. Simple madness. There was only a narrow ledge, a few inches wide, and balancing herself on the window-sill, Easter would have to make a swift leap to the balcony and then she would be compelled to pull herself

over the stone balcony, and it was broad. Otherwise, no coming back, she would drop to the sidewalk and be smashed to a pulp if she turned her body. "By God!" exclaimed Ulick, "she did it. Easter took the risks. She has muscles like steel. But what agility, what fearlessness!" Milt agreed with him.

"God is preserving her for something wonderful."

"The devil, you mean."

"God, I said. That woman—oh! how shamelessly she lives—interests me. I should like to be the one to lead her to salvation."

"Take care, Milt! Pride goeth before a fall. Your pride is the most dangerous brand—spiritual pride. Remember À Kempis: 'No man commandeth safely but he that hath learned to obey.'"

"A beautiful thought; the devil knows good quotations. I'm glad you remember your Imitation. Throw Petronius to the dogs. But I am talking so much that you have forgotten Mona and our engagement."

"The only subjects that interest me are sex, art, and religion."

"Huysmans said that better, Ulick. I'll ring up Mona. She's a good girl and will make you a good wife, and give me a brother I love very much.". . .

They weren't too late for their appointment. Mona met them at the car and they rode across the park to Easter's apartment. It was an engagement made that afternoon at the Vienna Café. Mona went to see Easter

at intervals, but, as she had promised, Milt was to be of the party. It was in the fumoir Easter greeted them. She jestingly called her bed-room her "aimoir." Sprawling on luxurious divans were three or four girls, Allie Wentworth among the rest. A monstrously fat woman with a face that recalled the evil eyes and parrot-beak of an octopus, sat enthroned, and in her puffy lips a long black cigar. Introductions. "We call her Anactoria," cried Allie, pointing at the large lady. "Isn't she a queen?" "Allie," said the other in a thick voice, "Allie, you ought to be spanked." "Spanking is too good for her," interrupted Easter. "Spanking is too expensive nowadays," pertly added the girl, who wore her hair like a pianist. "Spanking," remarked the fat creature, "is for virtuosi only." A roar followed this delightful allusion. "Anactoria has cell-hunger today," smirked Allie. "Out you go if you say another word. Remember company," Easter threatened. "Oh, as for that, a young man can't scare me even if he does button his collar behind." Allie distinctly pouted. "Don't mind her, Mel," interposed Mona. "There you go with you and Mel! Please, do please, tell me what Mel stands for, Mr. Milton—or should I say, Father Milton?" Easter sat near Milt and poured into his eyes all the magnetism of her own.

"Not Father Milton, Miss Easter," he remonstrated, "not yet. I shan't be ordained for several years. Mel is only a short version of my long and pretty-sounding

baptismal name. My mother must have been in a religious mood when she gave it to me. I am not worthy to bear it." Easter pleaded. He did not weaken, and she was secretly infuriated. She became a human dynamo. "I'll sing some Schubert and Schumann for you," she whispered to him, "better still, come to see me tomorrow and I'll sing Wagner for you—alone. I want to have a confidential talk about Ulick. He looks awful. He should consult a specialist." Her smile was grim. She was aware of Milt's plan to marry off Mona; the girl had informed her. Milt grew uneasy. He knew he was blushing. His throat was dry, his lips drier. The company rallied him. Ulick declared that he was flirting, but Allie raged. Her jealousy was so childish that Anactoria reproved her. "You can't blame Istar if the men adore her. I shouldn't trust what's-his-name with the collar buttoned behind over there a moment." With this decision she emitted a cloud of smoke and closed her little porcine eyes.

Easter sang Schubert's Almighty, and ended with Erlking. She sang gloriously. Milt absorbed the luscious tones as if they were living corpuscles. His passion for music had been rebuked more than once at the college. Canalized the tone-art could be made the vehicle ad majoram Dei gloriam; but in the theatre, it was only another snare of Satan, a specious, sensual snare. They drank tea. The conversation became general. As they went away Easter made a movement with

her lips which Milt read: Tomorrow! He bowed. In the car Mona confessed boredom. Ulick affirmed her judgment. An afternoon wasted. And what a queer gang Easter has around her, added Ulick. But Milt repeated the Pater Noster, and prayed: et ne nos inducas in tentationem! Openly he nicknamed Easter—Dame Lucifer.

X

A day later Ulick called on Easter. He felt depressed. His symptoms had become alarming. Easter was quite right—he should have long ago consulted a nerve-specialist. His left arm was continually numb and he dragged his left leg after him like a man who had suffered from a stroke; a mild stroke perhaps, yet something that threatened worse. He determined to see a doctor the next day. At the door he was greeted by Easter's Bavarian maid, who liked him because he could speak her own dialect. No, Madame went out for a call. She would soon return. His friend was in the fumoir—you know, the geistlicher Herr—the maid giggled—"What reverend sir?" he sharply asked. "Oh you know. Fräulein Mona's brother. He isn't well. I think he drinks an awful lot—" but Ulick didn't wait to hear the rest. He hurried to the smoking-room where he found Milt with a decanter of cognac before him, and uncomfortably drunk. Ulick was surprised and shocked.

"Milt! you here! What in the hell are you up to?" Milt didn't reply. His hair was tumbled, his eyes staring, his linen doubtful—all the stigmata of a man on a protracted spree. He mumbled unintelligible words and with a shaky hand pointed to the decanter. A mortal weakness seized Ulick. He sank on a divan and endeavoured to shut out the repugnant picture. Milt! His critic, Milt of the lofty ideals, a besotted animal in the House of the Harlot! It was that devil-woman who had dragged him down. Dame Lucifer. Yet he hadn't the heart to reproach the unfortunate young man who felt his disgrace and began to whimper.

"Spiritual pride, Ulick, goeth before a . . . rotten fall! What have I done! I've lost my purity, my manhood . . . it is my own doing—I, who would become one of God's anointed—I, Milton, of the priestly order of Melchizedek—that's my real name. Your Elsa-Istar coaxed the secret from me, first making me drunk, as did Dalila, Samson, making me eat the insane root. Painted veils!—Oh! Jewel, Jewel, she is irresistible—and I didn't think you worthy of my poor little sister—you ruined her, you evil one—but I forgive—who am I to judge another?—miserable sinner . . ." He drank. Ulick was too stunned to prevent him. Easter's handiwork! He would wait for her and give her a tongue-lashing, then get Milt away, somehow, somewhere . . . only to gratify a caprice she had ruined

the career of a weak man . . . she was a real vampire . . . Milton pointed to the brandy and fell back dead-drunk. An irresistible impulse prompted Ulick. He took Milt's half empty glass and swallowed the cognac. Immediately his brain cleared. He felt the fiery liquid to his toe-tips. He stood up and with a formidable oath kicked over the tabouret, decanter and all. Milt did not stir. The little maid rushed in with a volley of "Mein Gotts!" "Tell your mistress I'll come back for this gentleman. I'll get a hansom." "I think I hear her now," exclaimed the frightened girl. Easter entered. She was in coal-black silk, glittering with steel beads. She seemed to him like Astrafiammente the Queen of the Night, or another Astaroth, the Istar, who went down into hell and came back unsinged, only more evil. She frigidly regarded him. He controlled his hysterical desire to drag her to her knees and shout: Ecce homo! Woman, behold your work! But the gesture seemed melodramatic. He paused.

"Well?" she asked, "what are you doing here, Jewel?" His tongue was tied. He trembled in every limb. He couldn't withstand the potency of her eyes. He ejaculated:

"Poor Milt!" She smiled.

"That imbecile with his purity talk; going around with a chastity chip on his shoulder like a challenge!" Ulick revolted.

"You are a beast, Easter. You called me a beast

that day at Zaneburg: now it is you who are the beast." She steadily gazed at him.

"And ever since that day at Zaneburg, you have run after this *beast* as if you owned her. But you didn't—you never did, do you hear! You never had me." Her defiant speech was like the fortissimo from a full orchestra. The noise in his ears deafened him. He stammered:

"Never had you—but—but—but I did. I held you to me. . . ."

"You held the other woman, Roarin' Nell—it's the last kiss that counts."

"You lie!"

"I don't lie. I've never been anything to you."

"Who was it then?" She answered in level tones:

"Brother Rainbow, of course. In the darkness we all got mixed-up. And, of course, I assented—physiologically."

"That black monster . . . God!" He struggled with his emotions. Easter stood, waiting, her sombre beauty never before so disquieting. Then he got out of the accursed house, he didn't know how. He walked like a somnambulist to Ninth Avenue and entered the first saloon he encountered. He took a dose of whisky that brought an astonished expression to the red face of the bartender.

"Say, mister, that's a hooker you took." He tried to forget the hideous, grotesque Brother Rainbow.

"It's my first drink of—whisky."

"And it won't be your last," said the man with a knowing grin. . . . Ulick immediately ordered another and gulped it down. Nell! Ugh! she! . . . He heard the cloud-harps sounding as he faltered along. . . .

. . . Late that night Dora was awakened by a persistent buzzing. She ran to the door and found Ulick helplessly leaning against the bell. "What, you my baby Jewel, drunk? What a pink-tea party. Come in and go to bed on the couch. You'll be O. K. in the morning. What for did you go and booze like Paul or any other old drunk! You must feel awful bad slopping down red-eye at that. I'm glad you came home to your mamma—what's the matter?" Ulick moaned. "My side—it feels paralyzed—"

"It's only rum. Don't worry. What are you crying about?" Tears streamed down his tortured features. "I'm crying—I'm crying—because I'm so glad to be home again". . . he stuttered. "What a liar!" laughed Dora, and not attempting to undress him, she covered him with a shawl and went to her bed, where she slept the untroubled sleep of the wicked.

XI

. . . "You see, it's this way," explained Alfred years afterward to some of the newspaper boys around a table at Lüchow's. "Poor Ulick never had the staying

power. Brilliant? Yes—after a fashion. His mind was a crazy-quilt. Mince pie and Chopin. Can you beat it? He had the cosmopolitan bug, but he soon found out that the North American climate withered the Flowers of Evil of his Baudelaire and all the other decadent ideas and poetry he brought over with him. Poisonous honey from France—what? Our native air is too tonic for such stuff. His Fleurs du Mal wilted. So did he. He hadn't the guts to last. After his paralytical stroke at Dora's he was sent back to Paris, but he didn't live many years. He and his brother Oswald died within a few months of each other. Old man Invern didn't only bequeath them money—he probably gave them something worse. You know. Our old enemy, Spirochæta Pallida, I suspect. Otherwise, why did Ulick crumble after one real debauch? Their money—oh, it reverted to the Bartletts, cousins of the boys. Was he engaged to Mona Milton? That's news. I never heard of it and I was pretty thick with her family. You know she married Paul Godard, and it turned out a happy match—at least for her. She has a houseful of children. A blooming matron. But self-righteous now; turns up her nose at 'fallen women.' I visit there every now and then. Paul isn't a bad sort. He used to be a loose fish, and now he wears slippers and goes to bed early. Everything passes—even regret. Strange! Ulick never drank—except that time—or smoked—and he's gone. Mona doesn't mention his name. Her

brother! He got into a woman scrape here—never mind the lady's name—scandale oblige! He was fished out of the gutter and sent away to repent in some monastery out West. After he became a priest he was exported as a missionary to China. He was a born preacher. I think he drove Ulick to drink with his preaching—that's what Istar says. Istar? Thank you, she's very well. She's composed of harps, anvils and granite. The steely limit! A heartless, ungrateful creature. Fly-blown caviar . . . Yes, a wonderful artiste. But that doesn't always mean a civilized human. Yet, singers, actors, artists are not a whit worse as to morals than your business men, politicians, your shoemakers or your pious folk. The artists get found out quicker —that's all. I see her daily—I've known her nearly twenty years—and she grows wickeder every year. She is the great singing harlot of modern Babylon, a vocal Scarlet Woman. I'm sick of her. I've told her so. She expects me to be her fetch-and-carry. Not for thirty cents, d'ye hear? Why, boys, she's too mean to play the horses—and that's a bad sign. I'm tired, I'm going home. You can scandalize when my back is turned. But remember one thing—I'll live to write Easter's obituary in the 'Clarion,' perhaps write the epitaph on her headstone. As for music, I'm weary of it—opera in particular. When it isn't silly fashion, then people go for the sensual music. Sex and music, a rotten mixture."

He faded into the next room, where the band was playing, vertiginously.

"I'll bet that he will live to write Istar's obituary. Alfred must be fifty, but he's a wiry old rum-hound," remarked someone. "He's a parasite on Istar. He does all her dirty jobs. She hates him as much as he hates her. They hate each other so much that I wonder they aren't man and wife." It was the much-married Bell who spoke. His companions assented. As for poor forgotten Ulick—Oh! well, any young man of twenty can be brilliant. The test comes when you are sixty. It must have been a queer crowd—that sextet! Their reactions—or should I say, their vasomotor reflexes?—weren't precisely admirable. Dainty Dora, fair, fat, forty, was the squarest of the lot. She played the game. Now she's a fashionable modiste—a Madame. All her customers are men. But Istar? Ah! Istar panned out first-class. She may be a painted veil, as Ulick said, but the paint is beautiful, and the veil doesn't hide her good looks. To Istar! was the toast. And they drank the health of the greatest Isolde since Lilli Lehmann. Esther Brandès, the unvanquished. Istar, the Great Singing Whore of Modern Babylon.

THE SEVENTH GATE

At the seventh gate the warden stripped her; he took off the last veil that covers her body . . .

I

And because Istar had abhorred the Seven Deadly Virtues, and renounced them at the Last Gate in favour of the Seven Deadly Arts, the Warden of Life Eternal bestowed upon her the immeasurable boon of the Seven Capital Sins, which are: Pride, Covetousness, Lust, Anger, Gluttony, Envy, Sloth. . . Added to these are the Eighth Deadly Sin, which is Perfume; the Sin Against the Holy Ghost; the sweet sin of Sappho; and the Supreme Sin, which is the denial of the Devil. . . And Istar, Daughter of Sin, was happy and her days were long in the land, and she passed away in the odour of sanctity . . . Blessed are the pure of heart; for they shall see God. . . !

(*Alfred Stone's epitaph for Easter*)

II

Thus lived and died Ulick Invern in the companionship of his most intimate mentors throughout the tragicomedy of his existence. Two books had imaged his reverse aspirations: Petronius, his thirst for an Absolute in evil; Thomas à Kempis, his God-intoxicated craving for the Infinite. Euthanasia came to him wearing an ambiguous smile. Yet, who shall dare say that he had lived in vain? On the vast uncharted map of mysticism extremes may meet, even mingle. . . *Credo quia impossible est.* . .

FINIS

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